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LEAH : A WOMAN OF FASHION

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the Northern Sea. } |

MACMILLAN AND CO., LTD., LONDON.

L E A H

A WOMAN OF FASHION

BY

MRS. EDWARDES

AUTHOR OF

"OUGHT WE TO VISIT HER?" "SUSAN FIELDING," "STEVEN LAWRENCE,"
AND "ARCHIE LOVELL"

London

MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED

NEW YORK: THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

1899

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Appeared in the "Temple Bar" Magazine, 1874-75; First Edition, in 3 vols., crown 8vo., 31s. 6d., September, 1875; Second Edition, in 1 vol., crown 8vo., 6s., May, 1876; Reprinted 1883; Transferred to Macmillan & Co., Ltd., August, 1898; Reprinted, 2s., July, 1899.

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LEAH : A WOMAN OF FASHION

and says she is good of heart. Ah, Leah, if you had only seen M. Danton sooner! He has a picture just like you in his photograph book, and once when I asked him about that picture he turned white and looked so odd at me: however, it is too late now! Nothing can be changed, of course, when people's wedding dresses are ordered, only it is such a pity Jack Chamberlayne isn't nice."

"One cannot get everything, Deb," answers the elder girl, "and I am sure you have no reason to say bad things about Jack. Look at all the toys and bonbons, look at the beautiful locket, real pearl and turquoise, that he has given you."

"Oh, I know, and I like Mr. Chamberlayne in that sort of way very well, though not so well as Naomi does. Still, he is not nice, Leah. His voice is so husky, and you can always tell he has been smoking, and he has got red spots, and he dresses up like a girl, and drinks such *lots* of brandy-and-water, and plays tunes on his chin."

Leah laughs cheerfully, not in the least disconcerted, it would seem, by Deb's highly-coloured little picture of her future brother-in-law.

"Jack is not a beauty, certainly. Luckily no one ever judges a man by his face, Deb, and I shall have good looks enough for us both. As to his amusements—well, 'tis foolish, I admit, for a man to put on a bonnet and petticoats, and turn his chin into a musical snuff-box, but better be foolish than wicked, as Bell says when she moralises about my future happiness. Jack can't read more than half a page of a novel without falling asleep, and as the doctors limit, or try to limit, his smoking, he must do something with his time."

"Oh, but you may easily be foolish and wicked too," says Deb, with her weird wisdom. "I have heard M. Danton say so.

M. Danton says there's no wickedness can come up to a fool's wickedness, and I am sure he knows more truth about every subject than Cousin Bell."

"Cousin Bell knows one thing," says Leah, leaning fondly over her well-stored trinket-case. "She knows how to choose a bracelet! Putting aside Jack's diamonds, of course, Bell's bracelet will be the handsomest of all my wedding presents."

"And when you were poor, Cousin Bell never gave you anything, Leah, except one wretched garnet ring, do you remember, that wanted mending—and sometimes a dress or bonnet a little too shabby for her own lady's-maid! When you were poor, Bell Baltimore could only spare you her old cast-off rubbish; and now that you are going to be as rich as—that!" says Deb, spreading both diminutive arms wide, "Bell Baltimore will spend—oh, I dare say fifty—five hundred pounds on you for a bracelet!"

"The way of the world," answers Leah. "Has not my god-papa, the Venerable the Archdeacon, sent me the most lovely church service, all silver and crosses and white velvet? Have not his two dear daughters (who I am sure would have cut me in the street a month ago) subscribed a plated salver between them? Has not everybody belonging to us given me something, even old Cousin Anastasia, in Yorkshire, who quarrelled with papa—not because he married a Jewess, but because the Jewess failed to bring him a fortune—twenty years ago? It's a good, Christian, charitable, uncalculating world, Debbie. Fall well on your legs, as regards money, and see if every friend and relation you have will not rush forward and generously do his little best to steady you!"

"And fall off your legs, as regards money, Leah, what will all your dear friends and relations do then?"

"Ah, I have not come to that stage of experience yet," answers Leah. "If poor Jack—if anything should happen to hinder us from coming into the Chamberlayne estates, I dare say I shall have many things to learn on the score of friends and friendship! In the meantime, I am all my bracelets and prayer-books and plated salvers to the good. Help me to put my fineries away—why, you look green with the cold, child, and there is the tea-bell ringing! Actually it must be nine o'clock. You don't feel very frozen, Debbie, do you?"

"Not ve-very, Leah," says the child, her teeth chattering, as she lets herself slowly down from the high chair on which she has been perched. "I would sooner be cold with you up here than warm downstairs with Naomi and the Fossils. And all the time you were dressing I've been pretending to myself that we lived, you and me together, not in a Paris pension, but a grand London house, with carpets all over the floors, and fires in the bedrooms, and *our own* servants to wait on us. It makes such a difference, doesn't it, Leah, what you pretend to yourself?"

"You will not want to pretend when I am married, Debbie. You shall pay me as many visits as you like, and have a room of your own, and a little warm white bed, and a real theatre, with actors, oh, so big, to play with. You will be rare and happy then, Deb."

"If we could only have it all without Jack," says Deb, wistfully. "Oh, Leah, if you could have the big house and the velvet prayer-books (and a theatre with actors—so big—for me) and no Jack Chamberlayne!"

"If I could have the moon, Deborah! We must take the sweets and the sour together, as Fate sends them to us. Depend upon it, Jack will not get much in your way, or in mine either, by the time I have been married to him six weeks."

Deb shakes her head dubiously over this optimist view of newly-wedded happiness, but remains silent.

CHAPTER II.

THE PROLOGUE TO HER STORY.

WHATEVER economical shortcomings Madame Bonchrétien's boarders may be called upon, by the hardness of the times, to endure during the day, the drawing-room after-dinner fire goes a long way towards atoning for them.

Désiré, the hard-worked page in buttons, the solitary laquais of the establishment, has Madame's own commands to build up the drawing-room grille, high as hands can pile it, immediately after the ringing of the first dinner-bell. And well does Désiré obey the letter of the order, not wholly without the incitement, perhaps, of occasional small bribes from the more chilly-blooded or liberal-handed of the boarders.

Poor dear old souls, male and female ; the Fossils, as Deb's sharp tongue has nicknamed them ; to whom Madame Bonchrétien's hospitality, at fifty francs a week, is now, in the winter of their days, a cold equivalent for home. What intrigues go on amongst them to get the snuggest place by the fire ; what feints and counter-feints to secure the easiest chair, the corner of the room that has the best reputation in respect of draughts ! Madame la Comtesse de Miramion, by virtue of her title, the "leading lady" in the house, habitually leaves the table before dessert (and in a cheap Paris pension even four dry almonds and a savoy biscuit go for something) in order that she may take sure possession of *her* corner of the sofa. Major Macna-

murdo and Mr. Pettingall, yearly boarders, whose united ages amount to about a hundred and fifty, begin their game of cribbage as regularly as the clock strikes eight every evening, so the two arm-chairs by the card-table are looked upon as theirs by right. But for the remainder of the places 'tis a matter of hard fighting—hard fighting in which quarter is neither given nor expected.

"I have lived under Madame's roof fifteen years," says old Mrs. Wynch, at once the terror and mainstay of the house. "I've lived under Madame's roof fifteen years, and now, in my old age, she makes me pass my evenings on a straight-backed chair. That's the way with the French. Pay 'em their money—I've paid Madame over seventeen hundred pounds, from first to last—and as soon as they think you have bled enough, they care less for you than we in England care for a dog."

"I accord my ladies to tune their own flutes," Madame will answer, in her voluble English. "Where one shall sit, where the other? I will that all the world should sit well. These are not of my affairs."

When Leah and little Deb enter the drawing-room, the fire, as usual, is jealously guarded; several of the gentleman boarders, however, chancing to dine abroad to-night, even Mrs. Wynch has secured a position, about the warmth and comfort of which it is impossible to cavil.

She is a witch-like, curiously small old woman, gruff-voiced as a man, bent nearly double with years and infirmity, deaf as a post, bitter as gall; her attire, black cotton velvet and mock ermine, liberally besprinkled with snuff; her head-dress a little plate of lace and pink ribbons that would look coquettish on a blonde head of two and twenty.

"Oh, here you are, Miss Pascal," peering up out of her

puckered old eyes at Leah's shining beauty ; "been trying on some of your jewels, I suppose, eh ?" The morocco case containing the diamonds is still between Leah's hands. "I was younger than you when I married, just turned seventeen, and I had not an ornament belonging to me, except my wedding-ring. Girls made love-matches in my days. They didn't put themselves up for sale to the highest bidder as they do now."

"Love matches !" repeats Madame la Comtesse from the opposite corner of the fire. Madame de Miramion is an Englishwoman by birth, but having spent her life out of England, she speaks her own language with an accent. This is a peculiarity of the Bonchrétien establishment. You perpetually seem to hear bad English about you, or bad French. No one ever makes use of the tongue he can thoroughly master. "Would the dear old creature have us believe that she was married for love ? Ah, this is too strong."

The Comtesse in her youth, fifty or sixty years ago, was a noted beauty and toast. She has white little hands, a delicate meaningless profile, an upright slip of a figure, even now ; and even now she arranges herself for effect, rises from table or glances across her shoulder with an air, and has attacks of migraine for the sole purpose of coquetting with the doctor in a becoming nightcap. Between her and Mrs. Wynch wages deadly truceless war, barely veiled by the common decencies of civilization. Madame Bonchrétien has disposed their sleeping apartments on different floors, in different wings of the house. At dinner one occupies the head, the other the foot of the table. In the drawing-room the hearth-rug separates them. They have not shaken hands, they have scarcely addressed each other openly, during the last five years ; and still they fight perpetually. Hang two old caged birds of the same sex a yard dis-

tant from each other on a wall, and you will see very much the same kind of warfare carried on.

"Love matches! Madame Bonchrétien, I hope you hear the latest news? Our dear old friend would persuade Miss Pascal that the General married her for her beaux yeux."

Madame Bonchrétien looks round from the table, where she is assisting her junior partner, Miss Smith, to pour out tea. Miss Smith is a poor meek-spirited down-trodden Briton, who never speaks above a whisper in Madame's presence, and upon whose shoulders a great deal more than half the real work of the establishment falls. "Ah, my dear Comtesse, when we arrive at her age—eighty-six, I assure you, I have it from her conversation. Why, the General have been dead close on fifty years."

"He did not survive the love-match very long," says the Comtesse, with a laugh; the hardest, cruellest little ghost of a metallic laugh that ever proceeded from a human throat.

The rest of the company smile. Old Mrs. Wynch glares round fiercely from face to face. "You seem mighty well amused, ladies, upon my word! Don't let me lose the jest, pray. I did not quite catch Madame Bonchrétien's last remark."

Bonchrétien, ready in all disputes between "these ladies" to precipitate herself boldly into the breach, runs across the room, a tea-cup in her hand.

"Let me present you your tea, Mrs. Wynch. We laugh because we have the heart light. The good prospects of our dear Mademoiselle Leah take us back to our youth."

"They take us a very long way off, then," cries the old woman, giving a withering look round at the circle. "We are all ancient, very ancient, here. It's said of your establishment,

Madame—though you won't tell me your jest, I'll tell you mine—it's said of your establishment that the undertaker's man calls as regular as the baker every day for orders. Why, there is not a boarding-house in Paris as full of mummies as this one."

Bonchrétien laughs with serene good humour. Bonchrétien can at all times laugh, weep, condole, congratulate, express any shade or phase of human emotion at a second's notice. Little Deb Pascal shrieks aloud, dancing about the room with delight:

"The undertaker's man calls for orders—Oh, Madame, is it to measure the ladies and gentlemen for their coffins? Have Lord Stair and papa been measured? I hope papa has—he *would* look so droll! Naomi, wake up, I have something good to tell you! The undertaker's man calls here every morning of our lives for orders."

Naomi Pascal, at present fast asleep in the warmest corner of the room, is, beyond contradiction, the beauty of the family. Her cheeks are purest white and damask; her eyes luminous black, not dubious yellow like Leah's; her lips, nose, chin, all are faultless; not one irregular line mars the symmetry of the exquisite soulless face. Leah may be called singular, charming, piquante, irresistible, according to the taste of him who speaks. Every man, every woman who looks at Naomi makes use of the term, a beauty. She began first to hear that fatal word, beauty in connection with herself when she was about two years old. She has heard it perpetually since; from servants, relations, acquaintance, from the very passers-by in the street. Now, at fourteen, her soul—so far as Naomi Pascal may be said to possess a soul—lives, moves, and has its being sustained by no other interest, quickened by no other motive, than her own charma.

Her constitution is flawless as her face. She eats immensely, sleeps immensely, can, indeed, fill up all vacant or heavy hours of existence with one or other of these employments ; and as to temper—well, I don't know that you could call Naomi Pascal's temper "sweet ;" it would be juster to say that she is without temper of any kind, good or bad. Her placidity is marble-like as her smile, her heart. Salt tears in plenty have Leah and little Deb shed, bitterest heart-pangs known, while Naomi either dreamed, digested, or admired herself in the looking-glass, They have been motherless, with a cold indifferent father, have had to cope with poverty, and worse than poverty, ever since Deb can recollect anything. Naomi has slept, yawned, eaten, or tried on new ribbons through it all. Once only in her life, her sisters aver, has she known the taste of pain—the occasion when, with loud shrieks to earth and heaven for sympathy, she consented to have her ears pierced by the jeweller ; and even then the prospective vision of her own loveliness, enhanced by ear-rings, went far towards consoling her.

Beautiful, brainless, with a genius for sleep and food only equalled by her incapacity for suffering, what splendid materials for happiness, longevity, terrestrial success of all kinds has Naomi Pascal !

"The old ladies are going to fight—wake up, quick !" whispers little Deb, as Naomi languidly rubs the sleep from her lovely eyelids. There is no very great love between the younger Miss Pascals ; but Deb feels that it would be base to let even Naomi miss the delicious excitement of one of Mrs. Wynch's battles royal. "Look at the Comtesse's face ; look at Major Macnamurdo. Won't there be a row, just, before they have done !"

"Désiré," shouts Mrs. Wynch, a sudden glitter in her eye,

"j'ai à vous parler." She has lived in Paris twenty years, but speaks the most atrocious French that even the Bonchrétien establishment can produce ; a French that "shaves the ears," as the Parisians express it. "Vous avez oublié de mettre le thé, Désiré. Beaucoup eau chaude, pas de thé."

This is more than Bonchrétien can abide. Madame is of the Gironde, originally, and not all the philosophy gained in her profession, not self-interest itself, can, under insult like this, quell the fiery Southern blood within her veins. She darts back to old Mrs Wynch's side, her swarthy cheeks afire, her eyes kindling.

"Vous avez oublié de mettre le thé, Désiré," repeats the old woman, making a feint of handing her cup to the servant, but seeing all the time, as clearly as she ever saw anything in her life, that Madame, not Désiré, stands beside her.

"Indeed, Désiré forget nothing of the kind," shouts Bonchrétien, in her ear. "I serve Désiré the tea myself ; one spoon each person and two for the théière ; not a house in Paris where you 'ave equal thé with mine. But there is no pleasing you, Mrs. Wynch. I have worked my 'art for fifteen years to please you, and in vain. Nothing please you."

"Make that remark again, Madame, will you ? I am rather hard of hearing."

"I say that nothing please you, Madame Wynch, and I say it once more. You are ingrate."

Mrs. Wynch totters to her feet, her diminutive, shrunken figure shaking with passion ; she peers with her unearthly white old face full into the excited coffee-coloured one of Madame.

"Ingrate ! you call me ingrate ! What were you when I first came to you, when you lived in the Rue Lafitte ; five lodgers, up three pairs of stairs, and used to give them soup-meagre six

days a week and bully for an entrée? Whose money pulled you through? Who bought the commissaire out of the house when your sister died? Who helped you to pay young Arnaud's college debts? You have had seventeen hundred pounds of my money, Madame—I have your receipts to show for it—and now that you have risen in the world I get the worst room in the house, draughty, sunless, neither carpet nor bell-wires. I might fall ill in the night and lie there and die before I could make you or any of your servants hear me. You don't care whether I live or die. There was a window left unmended in my room five nights in the middle of January, and as to black beetles——”

“This is enough, this is enough, Mrs. Wynch,” cries Bonchrétien, whose face has gone through many curious evolutions of colour during the old woman's accusation. “I bear much when I remember of your age, and the long time we are friends, but when you speak of what does not regard you—of black beetles in one of my bedrooms, I look round at the salon, at these ladies, I make my appeal to the society—is it true or false?”

The society is mute. Mrs. Wynch is the terror of every inmate of the house, male and female; every one in turn has been made to writhe, as Bonchrétien writhes now, under the lash of that scorpion tongue. And, as long as the contest remained personal, every old lady present (for convenience, I enumerate the two dear old cribbage-players among the old ladies) would unhesitatingly have thrown her weight upon the side of Madame. But the moment wider questions are opened, more momentous issues trenched upon, public feeling veers. Talk of draughts, unmended windows, and black beetles, and not a soul present but is converted on the spot into a fellow-creature and a boarder.

“Madame la Comtesse,” begins Bonchrétien, appealingly.

Madame la Comtesse has lifted her handkerchief, the corner with the embroidered coronet displayed, to her peaked, high-bred, old nose, and pretends to be asleep.

"Major Macnamurdo, I ask you. Have you ever seen——?"

"Fifteen two, fifteen four, and two for his heels, six. Upon my word, sir, 'tis as close a game as you and me have ever played," cries the plausible old Irishman, conveniently deaf.

Madame turns away, desperate, towards the other side of the room. "Mrs. Amiral Tom-son," she exclaims, "I confide myself to your response. You hear of what Mrs. Wynch accuse my establishment. Is it true or false?"

Mrs. Amiral Tom-son—I like, with Bonchrétien, to give her her full, accentuated title—is an immense old woman, with drooping eyelids, a widow's cap, yellow curls, and a voice. Even Désiré, the pert Parisian gamin, picked up during one of the revolutions out of a gutter, and trained by Madame into a page, even Désiré, who, in his time, has quailed neither at Prussian nor petroleum, quails before the majestic British presence of Mrs. Amiral Tom-son.

"If you really ask my opinion, my dear Madame Bonchrétien," she replies, with sepulchral amiability, "I consider that there are black beetles in this establishment; many!"

"Many!" is repeated by the fickle voice of public opinion round the room. Poor little Bonchrétien sinks into a chair, beaten.

"And when next you use that word 'false,' Madame," goes on old Mrs. Wynch, upon whom most of the by-play has been lost, "when next you use the word 'false,' I would advise you to study your company a little first. I shall leave your house to-morrow morning." She threatens this, on an average, about twice in every three weeks. "I know a boarding-house, Rue

Boissy, where you can live for forty-five francs à week, and get three entrées at dinner."

"Forty-five francs a week! Three entrées!" ejaculates Bonchrétien, clasping up her hands heavenwards. "Of what, I ask the society, of *what* those entrées are they made?"

"And I shall pack up my things and go there. I'll never stay under your roof after what has passed between us. But I'll give you a bit of good advice before we part, Madame. Be more choice of your company before you use that word 'false' so freely. What are all of us here?"—her keen old eyes making a circuit of the room—"what are all of us, what are our lives but false? False gilding and fineries about us." Madame's salon is liberally adorned with looking-glass, velvet, and bric-à-brac, all of more show, perhaps, than intrinsic value. "And upon ourselves false hair, false teeth, false colour, false figures—false everything."

"She have put on her cap de travers. She must be removed to a house of health," ejaculates Bonchrétien, white as a sheet. "Madame la Comtesse, Mrs. Amiral Tom-son, I implore you make no attention to her frenzy."

"And you,"—turning to Leah, who, with little Deb, stands an amused spectator of the scene—"you falsest of all, young and handsome though you are. If you don't know what I mean, ask your conscience for an answer when you walk up to the altar on your marriage morning. Now I have said my say."

And so speaking, and shaking still in every limb with rage, Mrs. Wynch totters forth through a side-door from the drawing-room, and is seen no more.

"And there are who pray to grow old, who regard the white 'airs as a mercy," cries Bonchrétien, piously. "May I live so long only as I think well of my creatures, as I am at peace wid

all men. My dear Miss Pascal, you forgive her? She is incapable. When the mustard mount to her nose she know not what she says."

But Leah is silent. Since the first hour of her engagement she has been literally overwhelmed with sugared falsehood of all kinds, after the manner of brides-elect. Old Mrs. Wynch in her passion has struck the one true chord to which the girl has had occasion to listen, and it vibrates with curious power on her heart.

"Ask your conscience for an answer when you walk up to the altar on your marriage morning."

The words may not unfittingly be taken as a prologue to this history. While Mrs. Wynch was still speaking, the door communicating with the staircase opened quietly, and, unseen by any one save little Deb, a new actor appeared upon the scene. A new actor, destined from this moment forth to play a leading part amidst the *dramatis personæ* of Leah's life.



CHAPTER III.

OUTSIDE, IN THE COLD.

"MONSIEUR DANTON—my own dear Monsieur Danton!"

Deb's poor small figure flashes across the room at lightning speed. She takes both M. Danton's hands; with the lovely shamelessness of her age holds up her eager lips for M. Danton's kisses.

"What, Deb, my sweetheart, and are you really glad to see me?"

Danton is a man just the other side of thirty, of middle

height and slight compact frame ; his face dark and clear as a Neapolitan's, with black, close-cut hair already showing some tell-tale streaks of white, and a pair of steady, hazel-grey eyes. A resolute face, I should say, yet delicate, not the faintest trace there of that "soupçon of the bull-dog" so essential to the hero of modern romance, but rather about brow and jaw a fineness of outline going near to effeminacy. Has not one of our greatest thinkers laid down the axiom that no face wearing the stamp of genius can ever be without this touch of the effeminate ?

Leah looks at him, and, as far as love at first sight is possible in any nineteenth century heart, falls in love. He looks at her, and, as far as such a sensation towards a handsome girl is possible in any man of thirty, feels repulsed, exceedingly.

"Monsieur Danton, a day earlier than we attended him ! This is a pleasure, in truth."

Bonchrétien runs—agile little Frenchwomen of fifty really do run, and without upsetting chairs or tables—across the room ; she seizes both his hands with effusion. "Has M. Danton dined, supped ? Can she get nothing, positively nothing, for M. Danton ? Ah, then," with a wave leading him forward towards the fire, "she will no more withhold him from the happiness of saluting these ladies."

"And now you must speak to Leah," cries Deb, when M. Danton has gone the round of the room, and shaken each chill "Fossil" hand in turn. "She and Naomi came back a fortnight ago yesterday. Leah," bringing him to her sister's side, "this is M. Danton, *my* friend."

He bows, his eyes fixed upon her face, a world of admiration in their expression ; she returns the salutation by a smile, frigid

as ice itself. With such instinctive insincerity do men and women meet each other from first to last.

"Although I have not the pleasure of Miss Pascal's acquaintance, I cannot feel that I am a stranger to her," remarks Danton. His mother was English, he speaks our language without accent, and still the voice rings of his father's country. You must hear one of these liquid Italian voices speaking perfectly pure English to realise the charm of the combination. "Through Deb's agency we are already friends, I hope?"

Leah's eyes on this give him a glance—soft, shy, meant to slay; but Danton receives no wound. He knows the practised coldness, the practised warmth of eyes like hers so well; has surrendered to them in his time so absolutely, has paid the price of them so dearly.

"Deb is a little chatterbox. I can assure you, M. Danton, there are very few of your secrets that Deb has not told me. She has no scruples at betraying the confidence of her friends."

"In other words, Deb will be a woman one day. Does the woman live who would not betray her friends' secrets if the friend were rash enough to entrust her with them?"

"You must have had a very unfortunate experience in such matters, Monsieur Danton."

"An unfortunate, rather than an exceptional one, Miss Pascal."

They have known each other one minute and a half, and already their talk borders on intimacy. Whether fate hold love or hatred in her hand for them, the necessary affinities are here for either; they "get on." Perhaps to get on, after ninety seconds' acquaintance, is a more necessary condition of future hating than of loving.

"Most of our dear friends have so few secrets to betray,"

says Leah. "I should always be delighted, I am sure, to betray any one if I got a chance, but I don't. I cannot even remember what my dear friends have said five minutes after I say good-bye to them. And so their insipidity, not my honour, makes me faithful."

"You are candid," returns Danton, looking steadily into her face—a face that, with all its beauty, possesses very sparingly the master beauty of candour.

"I have a bad memory, simply," says Leah, with a laugh. What a charming little noiseless laugh hers is, displaying what marvellous teeth, bringing into play what dimples! Danton remembers its very counterpart—teeth, dimples, and all—and curses it in his heart yet. "Given a bad memory, nothing really saves trouble like the truth."

"Do you read much, Miss Pascal?"

"Only novels as yet. In future I shall have to dabble in politics, I'm afraid. They say you want leading articles for dinner-parties."

She sighs; Danton knows the sigh by heart as thoroughly as he knows the laugh; and the word "dinner-parties" becomes a confession.

"That sounds bad. When a young lady begins to talk about politics we know—we, who stand outside in the cold—what it is likely to mean."

"And pity her a little, I hope?" says Leah, turning aside so that, for the first time, he can see her profile; not an absolutely perfect one—what woman worth loving ever had an absolutely perfect profile? but a "point," nevertheless.

"Pity her!" repeats Danton, in a graver voice than heretofore. "Ay, Miss Pascal. The chances are she wants pity sorely enough, and somebody else, too."

Leah is silent. In the hands of a practised coquette silence also can become a point, and Danton turns from her to Deb—Deb who, listening to their talk and watching their faces, is in a chaos of doubt as to whether the two human creatures she loves best on earth mean to hate each other or not.

“And so you have been telling my secrets, Debbie! I shall be careful how I confide in you for the future, especially on the subjects nearest my heart. Now, in what particular matter have you been playing me false, I should like to know?”

He lifts the poor little deformed girl in his arms, and begins to whisper to her so softly that Leah alone can overhear.

“Have you been telling of my weakness for Mrs. Wynch, Deb; or letting the world know that Mrs. Amiral Tom-son frowns upon my suit? Deb, if you said one word about Mrs. Amiral——”

“You silly, silly Danton,” says the child, resting her face against his cheek. “Mrs. Amiral Tom-son, Mrs. Wynch, indeed, for sweethearts of a handsome young man like you!” Upon whomsoever Deb loves she bestows flattery as boldly as she gives battle to those she dislikes. “If I have ever told one of your love secrets, sir, it was about the photograph—the picture in your red book, you know—that I always said was so like Leah.”

If the thrust strike home, as the thrusts of these terrible children generally contrive to do, not a muscle of M. Danton's face betrays that he has been made to wince.

“The photograph in my book? Ah, I recollect—and it is like your sister, slightly. Who would have given you credit for such keen observation, Deb? The portrait in my red book has a sort of half look of Miss Pascal.”

Again he reads her face steadily; and Leah's eyes, not wont

to quail before the expression of any amount of masculine admiration, seek the floor.

"Nothing is more dangerous than to tell people they are like unknown photographs," she remarks, biting her lip to withhold it from a quiver. "We are all so profoundly satisfied as to our own charms that the mere suspicion of sharing them with anybody else is galling."

"If you saw the photograph Deb talks of, you would, I think, find it hard to take offence, Miss Pascal."

And Leah with all her vanity, overflowing, insatiate though it be, has sense enough to know that the speech is not a compliment.



CHAPTER IV.

"THEATRE!"

I MUST glance back for a moment at the past, just to show you the ground upon which Leah and Danton meet, ere I proceed further with their story.

It was about three months before the present time that Colonel Pascal, a sprightly, well-rejuvenated widower, unencumbered by visible children, first took up his quarters in the Rue Castiglione. A widower of fifty-five, unencumbered, good-looking, sufficiently easy in circumstances to engage Madame's first floor bedroom with the south aspect; and to drink his champagne at dinner a great deal more freely than any other boarder took the vin compris of the table. What a chance was here for every widow and spinster in the house! Mrs. Amiral Tom-son at once took her new black satin and Irish point into

common wear. The unmarried ladies surpassed each other in those bows and frills and hair-lappets by which the sex, at a certain age, lays its nets for unwary man. Even old Mrs. Wynch, her fourscore years well struck, would set her cap a little more jauntily on the top of her palsied head, and send the Colonel round her snuff-box "*avec mes complimong au Monsieur le Militairy,*" by Désiré at dessert ; whilst Madame Bonchrétien added daily to the bill of fare some little made dish or another of a nature likely to please Monsieur le Militairy's taste. So things went on with smiles, hopes, interchanges of politeness, and made dishes for a fortnight ; then—then came the payment of Colonel Pascal's first bill, and with it the shattering of many a fondly-nurtured female hope and illusion.

"Economy, but 'tis an economy of candle-ends," confided poor little Bonchrétien to these ladies. "So much off service so much off bougie, his bedroom fire must be compris, he will buy his wine out, and pay me what you call cor-kage. Allez, if it were not for the *désastres* of my country, I would say to Colonel Pascal take your walk. And now there comes a child to be nourished at half-price, and ten against one another child next week ! We know not the beneath of those cards yet. Ah, my dear ladies, but what a man ! If it were not for the *désastres* of my country——!"

The child was Deb, sent away sick from the cheap Boulogne boarding-school to which the Colonel's paternal heart had consigned her and Naomi during a protracted London campaign (matrimonial and otherwise) of Leah's. You may imagine the welcome she received, poor Deb, first from Bonchrétien, who regarded all children belonging to boarders in the same spirit as she regarded dogs and caged canaries, and who had agreed to nourish this one with the smallest possible margin of profit to

the establishment. Next from the old ladies who had weakly imagined Colonel Pascal unencumbered ; lastly from Colonel Pascal himself.

He loves none of his motherless girls over much ; he loves nothing in the world over-much save Colonel Pascal ; but the handsome persons of the two elder ones are satisfactory to his pride, wholesomely suggestive of hope, too ; handsome girls, in the course of nature, marry, and are got rid of. But Deb, misshapen, sickly Deb, who never can be handsome, never marry, and yet who, the doctors assure him, is not in the least more likely to die than other children !

—“ How d’ye do, my dear ? All these illnesses and journeys are a sad expense to me, very sad. If you could only have waited to the holidays. Now, I do hope you will be a very good little girl, and give no trouble, and make no noise, and keep a great deal in your own bedroom.”

This was Colonel Pascal’s reception of his youngest daughter.

And then it was that Danton and Deb became friends. Unlike “ these ladies,” Danton had taken an instinctive dislike to Colonel Pascal from the very first evening when that gentleman aired his long dyed whiskers and jewelled hands and intimate acquaintance with dukes and marquises at Madame’s fable. Nor was the feeling unrequited. “ The person called Danton, an out-at-elbows kind of medical student, I believe. Worst of these foreign boarding-houses, obliged to sit at table with gentlemen you cannot bow to in the street.” So Colonel Pascal would say, with eyes fixed on the ceiling, with drawled elliptic contempt, after the manner of his tribe.

But the sight of Deb, sick, solitary, neglected, overcame all Danton’s repulsion towards the father ; I should rather say he

lost sight of the father wholly, in his interest for the child. Poor Debbie was stowed away at night in some dark ground-floor cupboard, side by side with one of Madame's servants, a cupboard devoid of light or warmth, plentifully supplied with sewer gas and black-beetles. At dinner she got such odds and ends of vegetables or inordinately tough drumsticks as had been passed by and rejected by all the full-grown boarders in turn.

Sewer gas and drumsticks for a weak little ultra-nervous child, needing bountiful air and sunshine, milk and mutton chops! Deb grew greener and smaller, her lean limbs, leaner; the rings around her eyes darker. At last, without preamble or apology, Danton spoke to the father, spoke as a medical man and in the very plainest possible professional terms. Colonel Pascal treated him with the cool kind of contempt you might assume towards a quack doctor who was endeavouring to "make" a case for the lining of his own pocket. His little daughter had never been actually robust, but at present, thank God, was stronger than usual! He was indebted to Mr. ?—eh—ah—Danton, for his solicitude; but if he, Colonel Pascal, or his family, required medical treatment, one of the first physicians in Paris was Colonel Pascal's oldest friend; and—exactly—Colonel Pascal was sure Mr. Danton's delicacy would require him to say no more.

Then Danton betook himself to Madame Bonchrétien, to Miss Smith. He appealed to them as women—Madame was a mother herself—as Christians; they were hard, both of them, as the nether millstone. Colonel Pascal expressed himself satisfied. If the dear child's papa was satisfied, 'twas enough, surely, for *their* consciences. At last, finding sentiment powerless, Danton turned to science as an ally. He spoke to the women of light and its effects on all living organisms; spoke of the laws

of nutrition ; showed them how a frail little child might starve on diet that sufficed for elderly men and women ; finally, growing warmer, and forgetting his audience in the interest of the subject, he made use, accidentally, of the word Bioplasm.

It took effect like a bullet-shot. Nothing reduces women of a certain class to obedience like the timely employment of speech beyond their comprehension.

"I have cared for you as a mother, Monsieur," said Bonchrétien, whimpering. "I have mended you, nursed you, saved your money. And it has come to this. You charge me with such infamies to my very face !"

"It will be the ruin of the establishment," cried meek little Smith. "What stranger would come to a house of which an inmate, *and a doctor*, says such cruel things ?"

But it ended by their promising to put Deb into an airier bedroom, and to give her milk and mutton chops.

"Don't talk of the father," said Danton. "The man is no father at all—would be relieved by the child's death. If you are put to extra expense, I will pay you. Yes, Madame, *I*. I owe you a long bill, I know, of which you are good enough not to remind me, but I have my watch and shirt-buttons still out of pawn. Oblige me by buying, on my account, the tenderest loin of mutton you can find when you go to your butcher's this morning, and make the child eat three chops a day, at least."

After this fashion was Deb pulled round. As she grew stronger, Danton, in his scanty moments of leisure, would take the little girl out with him for such walks as she had strength for ; walks, most of them, through the very unfashionable quarters of the city where his professional engagements lay, but which, to the child, were simple elysian. So the weeks went by,

and so their friendship, a feeling amounting to a perfect passion of gratitude on poor Debbie's side, was cemented.

"I always hoped you and Leah would like each other, Monsieur Danton," she remarks, looking searchingly from one face to the other with her dark wise eyes. "But now that you have met, you are nearly quarrelling already. Perhaps it is just as well though—under the circumstances."

Something in the child's voice, or in a sudden glance she gets from Danton, causes Leah to blush over cheek and brow; Leah, who so seldom commits herself by the betrayal of emotion, who so seldom has any emotion to betray! She crosses quickly over to Madame Miramion's sofa, and kneeling down by the old Comtesse's side, opens her morocco jewel-case.

"I want you to help me, dear Madame de Miramion. You have such perfect taste in everything to do with dress, and I am really embarrassed, the embarrassment of riches! Mr. Chamberlayne gave me another present to-day," lowering her voice as she pronounces her lover's name, "some diamonds for my hair—and the jeweller has sent two sets for me to choose from. Now do advise me which to take."

The Comtesse draws forth her double gilt eye-glass. (None of us at Madame Bonchrétien's use spectacles; we are afflicted with weak sight, or far sight, or near sight, we are none of us blind from age.) She turns the diamonds over between her delicate old white hands with pious effusion. "Ah, my sweet Miss Pascal, what taste! Mr. Chamberlayne's generous devotion is only equalled by the perfection of his artistic sense. You must put them on before we can judge of the full effect; but first let us admire the excellence of the workmanship. Mrs. Tomson, Madame Bonchrétien, have you seen the last exquisite present sent to dear Miss Pascal?"

The ladies, at the word "present," all assemble round. Magnificent ! splendid ! sweetly pretty ! such an elegant design ! yes, and the mountings so chaste ! These, and kindred notes of admiration, rise in a chorus round the happy bride-elect. Remembering the circumstances of the case, the death-in-life that must await her as Jack Chamberlayne's wife, you might almost liken this chorus to the one which surrounds and encourages the Hindoo girl-widow ere she mounts the fatal pyre. A prejudice more or less, a difference in creed and colour, and where would be the difference ? Where, at all events, the moral superiority of the one sacrifice over the other ?

"I should choose the tiara, myself," says Mrs. Tomson, in her grand bass. No one knows in what quarter of the globe the late Admiral Tomson picked up his wife. By dint of very rich silks, very heavy jewels, and strict taciturnity, she contrives to pass muster tolerably well, in some circles. Still, superfluous "r's," uncertain "h's," do at times awaken suspicion as to the lady's origin. "With a regular line of face, there's nothing looks so imposing as a tiara, for the dinner wear especially."

"But, unfortunately, I have not a regular line of face," says Leah.

She makes the modest speech in a tone sufficiently loud for M. Danton to hear it ; but Danton keeps silence. He is looking over a heap of letters that Bonchrétien has handed to him, and is apparently too much engrossed by their contents to notice what the other occupants of the room are about.

"Not a regular line of face ? Oh, my dear Mademoiselle, you think too little of yourself."

"For my part, I have always considered Miss Pascal's line of countenance as *Grecian*."

So the feminine chorus once more swells round the victim—the willing victim of the coming sacrifice.

"I should decide upon whichever ornament is most the mode," advises Madame de Miramion. "In themselves, both are incomparable. The question is simply one of mode."

"I should take whichever I looked handsomest in, Leah," cries little Deb, edging her small face in beside the fine solid rampart of Mrs. Amiral Tom-son's skirts.

"And I," says Naomi, "would choose the one with the biggest diamonds." And the girl's beautiful eyes glisten, doubtless with honourable ambition for her own future, as they rest upon the shining loot of her successful elder sister. "I would look through the stones in each, one by one, and choose the most valuable. You could have them reset afterwards."

"Mademoiselle Naomi has reason!" cries Bonchrétien, into whose business-like hands the trinkets have now passed. "But, as far as I see, they are of equal value. I count the same number of stones to each. Ce cher Monsieur Chamberlayne determined it should be an embarrassment of taste alone."

"Then I suppose my only alternative is to have another grand trial of effects," says Leah. "I have gone through five, at least, to-day, in the vital interests of the jewellers and modistes!" And, thus speaking, she moves across to the mirror above the fireplace, and with a little air of weariness, charmingly acted, prepares for the rehearsal.

Impossible for Danton not to notice, or pretend he does not notice, her now. She is exactly before his eyes: so close that he can smell the sweetness of the flowers she wears, so close that the folds of her dress almost touch him.

It is an amber brown silk, well worn (Colonel Pascal practises the rigidest economy as regards his daughters' personal

expenditure), a silk matching the colour of her eyes and hair, and fashioned absolutely without ornament. Leah values the beauty of her own softly-undulating figure too well to allow milliners to disguise it by frills, puffings, and flounces. At her breast she has a few autumn violets, in her hair a knot of yellow ribbon: she raises her hands above her head to unloose this ribbon, and the sleeves of her dress falling back, display the roundest, whitest pair of arms that ever led the better sense of man astray since the world began.

Danton glances at her; in the glance takes in every detail of this loveliest living picture that glows before him, then falls to the perusal of his letters with redoubled attention.

"A man ignorant of the commonest decencies of life," thinks Leah, as she watches his reflection in the mirror. "To read—to pretend to read—with me before him! Monster, how I hate you; but you shall suffer, you shall suffer for it!"

She fastens in the spray of diamonds; the ladies are enchanted. She replaces it by the tiara; the ladies are in ecstasy. Even the two old gentlemen pause over their cribbage to admire and pay compliments. Danton, monster that he is, goes on quietly with the reading of his letters, and says nothing.

"And you, Monsieur Danton," cries the Comtesse, in her suave, well-bred voice. Danton is no favourite of Madame de Miramion's. Old Mrs. Wynch, little Deb, poor Miss Smith—the unpopular, the weak, the down-trodden, are Danton's friends. Madame la Comtesse, Mrs. Amiral Tom-son, Colonel Pascal, all the big-wigs and garnitures of the house, dislike, and in their hearts fear him. "M. Danton, we know you to be an artist by predilection. Let us have the benefit of your opinion."

He looks, not at Leah, but at the Comtesse.

"I shall be happy to give Madame de Miramion my opinion

on any subject that she likes," he answers, but without rising, without putting aside his letters.

"We want your opinion on *me* !" cries Leah ; and impelled by I know not what instinct of coquetry, what resolve of conquest, she places herself before him with a courtesy and stands there, an expression of mock-modesty on her downcast face, as though awaiting his approval.

"By what strange roads thought travels !" As Leah Pascal stands thus, two pictures—widely different ones, yet interlinked together by some subtle chord of colour, moral or physical—two pictures, both of mercenary, heartless beauty, rise before Danton's vision.

The first is of the greatest artist of all modern times, of Rachel in her prime. Danton was a little child when, for the sole time in his life, he looked upon Rachel's fatal loveliness, listened to Rachel's fatal voice ; yet even at this moment, his blood stirs at her remembrance. She is playing Adrienne Lecouvreur. With the concentrated, withering scorn of which Rachel alone was capable, she overwhelms the princess in that highly-wrought fourth act, where Adrienne first becomes cognizant of her well-born rival's shame. The fire of the sunken eyes outgleam the diamonds on her grand uplifted arms. The guttural Jewish accents pierce to the listener's marrow by their very quietness, the absence of all rant or violent theatrical emphasis. It is not acting, it is life. No clever artist is there, tearing emotion to rags, with due traditions of the stage. A woman, injured, loving, hating, vents her passion fearlessly, almost silently, and the crowded theatre sits hushed, trembling : savans, men of letters, critics, and the little child in the stalls, alike passing from pity to rage, from love to hatred, from indignant scorn to satiated vengeance, as the vibrations of

Rachel's eloquent voice bear them along. She softens, and a sob goes through the house. She steels herself once more ; with bent head, folded arms, and steady, glittering eye, bides her time, and every feverish pulse beats quicker, every heart shudders. She speaks ! with frenzied passion, pent-up ferocity, raising her tragic hands in anathema above her shrinking rival, her small head held erect, her nostrils swollen, and every spectator present rises to his feet, and almost mad with excitement, finds relief in prolonged and deafening plaudits. Danton, livid, transfixed, his childish limbs bathed in cold sweats, his soul carried into regions beyond his intelligence, applauding wildly, senselessly, frantically with the rest.

So much for the first picture.

The second is of a fair young English girl of nineteen. A marriage ring, untarnished yet, is on her left hand ; in her right she holds a bracelet and smiles, as our first mother may have smiled under the first temptation. "Eugene"—turning to her husband with those eyes of hers—golden-brown eyes like Leah's—placid, ingenuous—"to think that any one should be so generous anonymously. A bracelet set with all these rich diamonds for me !" She is near to him, like Leah ; her breath warms his cheek ; her arm——

"Monsieur Danton—Monsieur Danton !" cries Debbie, "you look like Lazarus in the big picture at the Louvre. Are you ill or dreaming, sir, or what ?"

And the child steals her thin little hand, with the ignorant sympathy of her age, into his.

Danton stoops and kisses her.

"I look like Lazarus, do I, Deb ? What a wise soul yours is to detect the charnel-house air so quickly ! No, I am not ill, my dear, nor dreaming either ; only seeing visions of fair faces, of

which Miss Pascal's"—bowing low to Leah—"is the crowning one."

Leah colours ; but whether with pleasure or annoyance she herself knows not. Every look, every word of this man's might pass for flattery, in the ordinary relations of men and women ; and yet Leah knows by instinct that she was never less flattered in her life.

"You are complimentary, Monsieur Danton, but vague. I want a practical criticism just now."

"Upon yourself, or upon your diamonds?"

"Upon my diamonds, of course. Do you really think my tiara becomes me or not?" looking at him as few men have ever been looked at by Leah Pascal's eyes without receiving their death-wound.

"I should say *not*," answers Danton, as coolly as though he were giving his opinion on the shape of a decanter or the pattern of a carpet. "Of the diamonds, as diamonds, I am no judge. Their effect on Miss Pascal's head is grotesque—simply."

"Grotesque!" comes in many-toned indignant chorus from the old ladies.

"Monsieur Danton probably does not know the value of diamonds like these. We can well understand that," remarks Mrs. Amiral Tom-son, pompously.

"Monsieur Danton would not be Monsieur Danton if he could think like other people on any subject," says the Comtesse, in her malicious little high-bred whisper.

"Monsieur Danton is reserving all his admiration for the other ornament, the adorable spray," cries Bonchrétien, creamily peace-making as usual. "My dear Miss Pascal, if you would allow us to see."

But Leah has swept the diamonds angrily from her hair, has

replaced and clasped them in their case. A flush, lovely as day-dawn, born of wounded vanity, stains her face. "It is a great deal too late for you to be up, Deb, and you too, Naomi. Go to bed this moment, both of you. Do you hear me, Deb, go!" for the child lingers, caressing Danton's hand with her cheek. "Another night you shall not stay up, listening to all this sort of nonsense."

"Not stay up, Leah?" cries Debbie, her great eyes filling. "And there are only seven more evenings left before your wedding! How can you find it in your heart to be so cruel?"

"Ah, there is the question," says Danton, but so low that only Leah hears him. "How can she find it in her heart to be so cruel?"

"And Mr. Chamberlayne has you half the day, and the horrid dressmakers and milliners the other half, and I hate people being married!" cries Deb, with more fire than coherence. "Oh, Monsieur Danton, don't you go and be married next."

"Not very much danger of that, Deb," says Danton, lightly, and still with a certain change of voice that recurs afterwards to Leah's memory.

Mrs. Amiral Tom-son and the Comtesse exchange glances.

"No *possibility* of it, sir, I should trust," remarks the former with trenchant emphasis. "There are situations in life—um—haw—situations——"

"Dreadful exigencies in which morality submits to a suspension of her own rules in favour of her own principles. Burke.' The quotation has assisted you, I hope, Madam?"

Danton turns his back to the fire. his face to the foe, a position that his enemies (most of the people in the house are his enemies) know means fighting; a smile, whose serenity is that of all conscious virtues enthroned, lights up his handsome Southern face.

"A very dangerous maxim, indeed," mumbles Mr. Pettingall, as he rises with stiff limbs from his cribbage. "A very dangerous experiment ever to suspend the sacred rules of morality."

Mr. Pettingall is an old gentleman of seventy-five or six, white-cravated, white-haired, venerable; cashier once in a too well-known Indian bank, says rumour, a bank that failed fraudulently, and who, during the past twenty or thirty years, has been holding church-door plates, officiating as amateur churchwarden, and generally supporting and collecting money for the Protestant interests in Paris. An extraordinary rigid old gentleman; Spartan-like towards all human frailty—especially human frailty undraped by wealth—a hot and undisguised opponent of Danton's. "A red Republican, like his namesake, sir. A man who has been seen to walk arm-in-arm *with actresses* on a Sunday, and who has not got a fixed principle belonging to him." Thus will Mr. Pettingall speak, with upliftings of the virtuous old eyebrow, and shakings of the venerable old Tartuffe head.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Pettingall," cries Danton, good-humouredly. "What was your last remark? The sacred laws of morality? I was unfortunate enough to lose the drift of what you said."

But Mr. Pettingall has no desire to cross swords openly with his antagonist. The stiletto, not the sword, is the weapon in favour in Madame Bonchrétien's house. Eleven o'clock strikes; and exchanging many a whisper, many a Lord Burleigh nod as they go, Mrs. Amiral Tom-son and the Comtesse sail stately from the drawing-room, the two old ladies in coats and waistcoats following. Another three minutes, and Danton is left alone—Danton and poor grey Miss Smith, silent, cold, unnoticed in her corner behind the tea-table, as is her wont.

The smile dies from his face. 'Tis a sad face, now that you see it absolutely without mask—a face with more hollowness about the temples, more lines around the mouth than Danton's two-and-thirty years of life should warrant. He stands with folded arms, with a blank despondent expression in his eyes, staring absently into the dying embers of the fire.

"Sit down, my dear, and let me fetch you your slippers," says a kind little twittering voice at his elbow. "And do make yourself a cigarette, Monsieur Danton. None of the old ladies will come back any more to-night."

Miss Smith is—no, I should be sorry to guess, even approximately, at Miss Smith's age. She is young enough to wear her own brown hair in ringlets; old enough to call Danton "My dear," to get him his slippers, and carry him his tea before he rises in the morning, without scandal—one of the humblest, least selfish, most oppressed creatures in the universe; not lovely of face, not bright in intelligence, and weak enough of heart . . . ah, let us respect the poor soul's secret, as religiously as does the object of it himself. *Is* there anything so superlatively ridiculous in the devotion of a forlorn and loveless woman like Miss Smith to a man a dozen years her junior? For the life of me I cannot see it. She knows that Danton cares for her, in the way of love, about as much as he cares for Sappho, the tabby cat; and if, knowing this, it is her pleasure to bow down to him, slave for him, receive his very neglect as a favour, who shall blame her? Viewed in the light of reason, there are few forms of worship, perhaps, that do not exhibit some trifling leaven of absurdity.

"Cette pauvre chère Smeet!" Bonchrétien will say, pityingly. Madame herself is not without a lurking tenderness for her handsome boarder—no, a *tendresse*; there is a wide distinc-

tion between the two, a tendresse stopping infinitely short of either worship or servitude. "Cette pauvre chère Smeet, and her little artifice—artifice, what you say, worked wid white thread! But all English old maid the same. Quiet as the petit St. Jean outside, and within!" And here Bonchrétien spreads her ten fingers wide, and rolls her eyes in their sockets, in pantomimic representation of the volcanic fires that devour "cette pauvre chère Smeet's" inner woman.

"Sit down, my dear Monsieur Danton, and rest. I will be back with your slippers in a moment."

She wheels the most comfortable arm-chair in the room before the fire, flies up to the third floor for his slippers; I regret to say, helps him to remove his boots on her return—Danton should be above permitting such slavery, but he is not; then takes her own place modestly, at three or four yards' distance, and sits waiting till it shall be M. Danton's pleasure to speak, while M. Danton folds for himself and begins to smoke a cigarette.

"No smoking allowed," is placarded all over Madame Bonchrétien's house. And Danton smokes cigars in the salon, pipes in his bedroom, cigarettes everywhere. What revolutionary crime does Danton not commit against every established law and morality of the establishment?

"You are looking rather pale, Monsieur Danton," commences Miss Smith, after a long pause. "I do hope you have taken to your flannels, sir? The autumn is setting in chill."

He is watching the tiny blue tobacco clouds curl upwards above his nose, and makes no answer. Nineteen times out of twenty it does not even occur to Danton that he need answer "cette pauvre chère Smeet's" remarks.

"And your socks. I felt so unhappy when I found you had

gone without any woollen socks. But, as Madame packed your portmanteau herself, I was afraid to say anything."

Still no answer. M. Danton, with the same abstracted air, smokes his cigarette to the end, manufactures and lights another, Miss Smith, the while, sitting perched upon the edge of her chair, meekly waiting. At last, "You know what I went over to London for?" he begins, abruptly, and without turning his face towards his companion.

Yes, Miss Smith knows. A sad, sad errand; a most tragic—

"I found her," he continues, shortly, "and with less difficulty than I expected."

"You found?"—Danton is absolutely, unnaturally quiet; but poor little Smith is all a-tremble. You can see her sparse ringlets quivering with agitation in the fire-light. "You found?—oh, Monsieur Danton!—my dear, dear sir!—what agonies you must have been enduring!"

He smokes through his cigarette placidly, flings the small remaining atom into the embers, then takes out his watch and prepares to wind it up. Whatever agonies he may have been enduring in London, M. Danton, for certain, is suffering nothing in Paris. So judges Miss Smith, who knows him well; so would judge ninety-nine out of any hundred ordinary observers who watched his demeanour at this moment—but the hundredth one might judge otherwise!

"I tell you this, Miss Smith, because I know, good, kindly soul that you are, how everything connected with me interests you. And I mention it for another reason. Mr. Pettingall, I can see, has spoken. The people in this house know the story of my shame, every one of them."

"Oh, M. Danton!"

"Know it, or imagine worse—it matters little. Well, if they

plague you about the result of my journey to England, simply give them this answer : ' Monsieur Danton has seen the woman who desired reconciliation with him, in London, and she is well.' You understand ? Not one word more or less."

And with this it would seem that Danton's confidences are over. Taking out his tobacco pouch, he begins to fold himself a third and final cigarette, and as he does so sings ; every cloud or trace of a cloud vanished from his handsome face,

" Oh, ma maîtresse !
Oh, mes amours !
Fuyons ensemble,
Et pour toujours !"

His singing voice, like his speaking one, has the true Italian ring, the liquid penetrating timbre of those Southern voices whose faintest tone is music. A great many people in the world hate Danton passionately ; a good many love him ; but over lovers and haters alike that voice of his holds sway. " The fellow can do one thing—sing," even Colonel Pascal, about the bitterest of his enemies, will allow.

Poor little Miss Smith sits watching him curiously, just the faintest degree in the world shocked. To his Southern levity, his quick transitions of mood and spirit, she is tolerably used. But that even he, Eugene Danton, can sing reprehensible French songs about " Ma maîtresse," and " mes amours " in the same breath with which he has spoken of that tragic errand of his to London, does take her aback.

" ' Oh, ma maîtresse ! oh, mes amours ! ' Talking of ' mes amours,' " he has risen to leave the room, and turns in the act of opening the door, as if the thought had suddenly struck him, " what about this girl with the diamonds and the yellow eyes, Colonel Pascal's eldest daughter ?"

"Miss Leah Pascal. She is to be married on the 18th to an exceedingly rich gentleman, Mr. Chamberlayne."

"Unfortunate man! I pity him from my soul."

"You will pity Miss Pascal most when you see them together. Mr. Chamberlayne is a miserable little worn-out creature, sir, with death written on his face, and in spite of his riches he dresses like a groom, and people *do* say—drinks! And yet that girl—a handsome girl too——"

"Not ill-looking certainly," Danton admits, with a half yawn.

"But a coquette—ah, M. Danton, take care of yourself, a coquette!—flirting (on the brink of marriage though she is) to desperation with Lord Stair; liking Lord Stair, I believe, in her heart, and all the time as ready to walk up to the altar with Mr. Chamberlayne as though he were an Adonis."

"Of course she is," answers Danton, lightly. "Adonis ungilt would have no market value whatsoever now-a-days as a husband.

"'Oh, ma maîtresse!'"

He runs upstairs, the reprehensible refrain still upon his lips, and on the landing of the third floor encounters the girl with the yellow eyes and the diamonds face to face.

Leah wears no diamonds now; her silk dress is replaced by a plain white wrapper, that discovers the beauty of her slight round form to the utmost. Her bright hair, freed from pads and pins, ripples below her waist. She holds the traditional midnight taper in her hand, and gives the traditional little midnight start and run on seeing Danton.

"Theatre," he decides, promptly. "The whole effect is planned, well planned." Does he like her the less for this? Does a man of thirty ever like a handsome girl less for the strategies by which she compels his admiration?

"You are late, Mademoiselle."

"I—I have just been in to kiss my little sisters." Leah and Naomi Pascal kiss each other about twice in three years, or seldomer. "I—oh, M. Danton, I am so glad to have a chance of saying a word with you before I sleep! I do so want to thank you."

Danton makes no reply. The game is too completely in her hands for him to seek to interrupt it.

"If you knew how seldom a word of truth comes to me; if you knew, amidst all the buzzing of foolish flattery, the *good* it did me to hear that word 'grotesque' from your lips! I am sure I shall never, never care for diamonds again."

"In the shape of a tiara, I am convinced you will not," says Danton. "Those stiff, regular lines set above a face of which the charm is—not regularity, are a mistake in art. The very last mistake Miss Pascal would be likely to commit."

"Irregular in feature, grotesque, artificial! I wonder what truth there can be left for you to speak and me to hear."

The taper trembles in her hand, her eyes droop so that, perforce, he notices the length and blackness of the lashes against her cheek.

"What truth there can be left for me to speak and you to hear?" says Danton, very low. "If you give me leave, Miss Pascal, I will tell you."

Leah turns from him quickly and takes shelter in her room, the door of which stands opportunely open. She walks to her glass, holds up the light, no trembling of the hand now, and looks at her own great fairness as it stands there mirrored before her.

"Poor M. Danton!"

This is what Leah Pascal thinks, with the delicious exultant

flutter that only gratified love or gratified vanity ever brings to human hearts.

And "Poor Mr. Chamberlayne!"

This is what Danton thinks, with no flutter whatsoever, either of vanity or love.

So the tools, edged to a nicety, are in their hands; so the game, to be played out to the death in future times, has fairly opened.

CHAPTER V.

ENTER—MY LORD STAIR.

It is Madame Bonchrétien's habit to acknowledge that Providence has crowned her widowed lot with many mercies; of these, George Francis Lord Stair, fifth Viscount of that name, is, beyond dispute, the topmost glory, the herb of grace, the sweet marjoram of the salad.

"I have, of my habitués, the widow of an admiral; Mr. Pettingall, one of the oldest inhabitants of Paris, and a churchwarden of the Temple; and—Milor Stair!"

Thus speaks Madame when bent on luring new-comers into her circle, and not in vain. On more than one occasion has she seen flutterers acquire decision, sceptics converted on the spot, by the magic of that one word—Milor!

Milor does not pass his life, as you may believe, in the Rue Castiglione. In London, Monaco, Vienna, the face of George Francis Lord Stair is periodically familiar. But the Rue Castiglione is the nearest approach to a home that it possesses; an empty portmanteau or two, bearing his noble name in black

letters, reside there always, his bills go there, the more respectable of his letters go there, and absent or present, he has never, during the past five years, been out of Madame Bonchrétien's debt. Has she not just cause to boast of Milor Stair as a resident?

His acquaintance with Leah Pascal began a fortnight ago; the acquaintance that, if Miss Smith may be credited, already bids fair to endanger Jack Chamberlayne's peace; but Leah Pascal and Lord Stair are both adepts in the dangerous art of "safe" flirtation; and whatever we do well we do quickly!

Leah, being handsome, engaged, and rich—prospectively, Lord Stair thought it worth his while to lay siege to her vanity within twenty-four hours of his introduction to her. I say vanity, advisedly. Lord Stair never troubles himself about women's hearts. Vanity and hunger are the only human motive powers that his creed acknowledges. Lord Stair being a notorious Lovelace, a Lovelace scarcely better known for his conquests than for his own invulnerability, Leah resolved to subjugate *him* even before she had lifted her eyes to his face. And both have succeeded fairly well; with what ultimate gain to themselves or to society we shall see later on.

That the flirtation has multiplied Leah's future chances as a woman of fashion is beyond question; Lord Stair, bankrupt and erewhile outlaw though he be, knowing Everybody, of the half world as of the whole, in London. Nor can the sincerity of his attentions (I was nearly writing his intentions) be questioned. He gives up his club of an evening that he may sun himself in the yellow light of Miss Leah's eyes. He allows Colonel Pascal to walk arm-and-arm with him about the Rue de Rivoli and the Bois. He has even borrowed a hundred pounds of the lover, little Jack Chamberlayne, who is at present in Paris, awaiting his marriage.

Whenever Lord Stair is in earnest on any subject, you may be quite sure he will borrow money from some one as an initiatory proceeding.

"We missed you terribly, last evening, Milor. Mademoiselle Leah essayed her diamonds, the last delicious gift of ce cher Monsieur Jack, but we had not got Milor to assist us with his taste."

Leah and Lord Stair are dawdling over their late breakfast in the *salle-à-manger*, while Madame Bonchrétien, serviette in hand, nightcap on head, flattery on tongue, flits nimbly to and fro about the room. To-day is a field day in the establishment; Mr. Chamberlayne invited in state to dine with Colonel Pascal; and the whole house is in a fever of preparation. Even the two supremest people in Madame's universe, the bride-elect and Milor, are forced to eat their breakfast at a side table. The centre one groans with piles of glass, artificial flowers in disorder, mock-silver dish-covers, and *épergnes* still untwisted from their tissue paper; all the raw material that eight days later shall grace Leah's wedding feast.

"Yes, indeed, we missed you," says Miss Pascal, with one of her side looks. "I almost think I miss Jack when I have to spend the evening among the old ladies unrelieved. Not that poor Jack is amusing, but he makes a noise, and that is something. By-the-by, you and papa dined with him last night, Lord Stair. What did you all do?—bore yourselves and each other very unmercifully?"

"I am always bored except when I am in one place now, Leah," is Lord Stair's answer. He began playfully to call her "Leah" on the first day of her return to Paris, and the joke stands now; even Mr. Chamberlayne having to accept it with as good a grace as he can. "But the party, as a party, was a success.

Chamberlayne gave us, as he always does, an excellent dinner, excellently served, and had some capital fellows to meet us."

"And afterwards?"

"Afterwards, we had a pleasant little game of loo. I am ashamed to say how much your father and I came away to the good, Leah. Chamberlayne lost, of course. A man who is winning life's real prizes, like Chamberlayne, may be content to exhaust his bad fortune upon loo and *écarté*!"

Lord Stair sighs, and pushes away his plate. A man evidently without morning appetite, but whether from the state of his *morale* or his stomach, it would be hard to guess; impaired digestion producing symptoms so closely resembling those of overburthened heart or conscience. A sallow, fattish man, forty on his last birthday, says the 'Peerage,' bald, with thin reddish moustache, quite red hair, and an ugly obliquity in his small grey eyes, that, perhaps, if he were not a Viscount, might be called a squint. And still he is distinguished-looking; tall, erect—Lord Stair was in the Guards in his youth—and in spite of his chronic insolvency, one of the best-tailored men in Europe. His teeth are white and well-shaped, his hands white and well-shaped, though somewhat overfat like his figure; his manner of entering and leaving a room, putting on an opera cloak, or holding fans and bouquets, as near perfection as anything mortal can be. Of his mental qualities it would be harder to speak; seeing that to men he seldom talks at all, while to women he talks in whispers that the world (happily for the world) hears not. He tells stories rather well, of a certain Rabelaisque flavour, and short; and he is always well-posted in the last scandal of the hour, political or social, but coy of revealing it. A man who impresses you with the notion that he was born to succeed in some one or other of the world's great

charlatanries—diplomatic, stock-jobbing, private inquiring, or the like. And who *has* succeeded . . . no, these are not the pages wherein to chronicle Lord Stair's past life.

"If he has brought so many people to grief," said Leah, once—some of the old ladies, watching the dawning flirtation, thought it a duty to advise the girl as to poor dear Lord Stair's reputation—"If he has brought so many exemplary people to grief, destroyed the happiness of so many virtuous households, all I can say is, that the happiness of virtuous households must rest upon very shaky foundations. My peace of mind endangered by Lord Stair? Why, he is the very ugliest man out—bald, red-haired, a squint, and the age of papa. Oh, I don't care about the 'Peerage,' all books tell stories—the age of papa! He takes a fatherly interest in my affairs, he calls me 'Leah,' as he calls Naomi 'Naomi,' and seems disposed to be kind to Jack and me after we are married. Dear, good old harmless goose that he is!"

Which innocent little outburst of credulity must not, however, be received as Gospel. Some persons are disingenuous on principle, some from habit, others from fear. There is a fine natural spontaneous insincerity about Leah Pascal, an instinct impelling her to falsehood, just as instinct impels the mole to burrow or the otter to dive. She dissembles because she must. Remembering the two strains of blood that mingle in her veins—blind forces, shaping thought and action just as peremptorily as they mould lips and chin—I don't know that the idiosyncrasy can be marvelled at.

Lord Stair pushes away his plate after he has swallowed a couple of mouthfuls; nor does Miss Pascal show a much robust appetite. A girl of twenty should be able to breakfast heartily at any hour, off any materials, but Leah has all the fastidious

caprices, the inchoate likes and dislikes of a genuine woman of fashion. With well made little plats and Chablis she might eat. These half-cold cutlets, this most ordinary of Bordeaux, re-corked after yesterday's dinner, tempt her not.

"*Nous mangeong de pease ong pease*," growls Mrs. Wynch. The old woman, in a snuffy camisole and with her wig awry, is breakfasting alone at a corner of the big table; a position from whence Bonchrétien, Désiré, and Miss Smith have in vain tried to dislodge her. She pays as well, pays better, than Colonel Pascal—pray, are her bougies, her service, "*compris*?"—would not move from her own place at breakfast though a hundred Colonel Pascals were going to give mock-fine dinners to mock-fine friends. "*Madame Bonchrétien, Désiré, Rose—where are you all? I say we eat from worse to worse. This fish smells. At the pension in the Rue Boissy you get fish, fresh fish, two entrées, and a dessert for breakfast. But that's the way when you stay too long in a place. I have lived under Madame's roof fifteen years, I have paid Madame over seventeen hundred pounds, I can show her own receipts for them, and this is the way she treats me now. Votter poissong pooh, Madame! But the French are all alike, all alike.*"

She sits muttering anathemas, and shaking her poor old palsied head over her well-kept "*poissong*," while Madame, gay as a grasshopper, flits hither and thither among her artificial flowers and *épergnes*, unheeding. That Mrs. Wynch is not likely to leave, Bonchrétien knows. Her complaints, her threats, are perennial, like her bursts of passion; but she stays.

"She return always to cook at my stove," Bonchrétien will say, in her wonted style of idiom, and with an expressive shrugging of the shoulders.

Where, at eighty, shall a forlorn human soul, bereft of all

nearer ties of kith or kin, find new shelter? Mrs. Wynch will not leave the Rue Castiglione till the undertaker carry her thence; and if she did, Bonchrétien could bear the loss. Mrs. Wynch's money tided the Bonchrétien family over a good many dark shoals in days gone by; but Madame has risen in the world now, and her memory, like that of some other successful persons, is short. Besides, does not Mrs. Wynch's income die with her? Who can feel sympathy for a cross-grained exacting old woman of eighty, who has been selfish enough to sink her capital in a life assurance?

Mrs. Wynch goes on muttering anathemas, her head bowed down over her plate; Madame is busy among her *épergnes*; Milor, in the distant corner, sits whispering into Leah's ear; whispering, it may be conjectured, about some subject of unusual interest, if one may guess from his companion's downcast eyes, the smiles, half reluctant, half approving, that play round the corners of her lips. To these, just as the big clock above the mantelpiece strikes twelve, enters Danton, hat in hand. Danton's hours are not the hours of the ordinary Anglo-Parisian. At six, winter and summer, he has his early cup of tea. Before seven he is at work, either abroad in the city, or in his own rooms, according to the season of the year. At noon he breakfasts, or dines, as you choose to call the meal, and *not* upon cold cutlets and overkept fish. From Madame down to the lowest scullery woman, not a functionary in the house but cares for the comfort of this "out-at-elbows medical student" more than for that of all the other boarders put together.

"Danton! What, you have come back, have you?" cries old Mrs. Wynch. "I was beginning to think we had got rid of you for good. You will not find the house improved in any way, sir, nor the company either, during your absence."

"And your cough, Mrs. Wynch?" he asks, bending over the shrunken old form, kindly. "Why, you are looking charming—ten years younger than when I left."

"Get away with you!" cries the old woman, but a look of something like pleasure brightens over her crabbed face. "Ten years younger, indeed! Who could look younger on such a diet? I know what my relations will say when I return to England." She is always talking of England and her relations, but has seen neither for twenty years. "'Is that you, Lavinia?' they'll say. 'Why, where are your good looks? where's your ong-bong-pong?' I was a well-preserved, well-nourished woman, Danton, when first I came under Madame's roof."

Bonchrétien, at this, looks round with a dangerous eye from her work, and Danton, who probably knows the storm-signals by dark experience, hastens to ask Mrs. Wynch why the breakfast is not placed on the long table as usual? Has Madame got an addition to her guests, or what?

"Madame's guests are going to see company, Danton; that's what it is. You and I, who pay like the rest, may be made comfortable or uncomfortable—that don't matter to Madame! The French are all alike. You remember Pascal, don't you?—Colonel Pascal? A man with a good deal of sham jewelry and sham talk? Well, he has got a grown-up daughter here, now."

"Mees Pascal is in the room," shouts Bonchrétien, in an agony, across a pyramid of piled-up chairs. "Mees Pascal is at breakfast beside Milor!"

But Mrs. Wynch, deaf at all times, is never so deaf as when Madame Bonchrétien attempts in earnest to make her hear.

"A grown-up daughter, and a handsome girl too. And she is going to be married. Her sweetheart will dine here to-day."

Bonchrétien breathes again. Considering the speaker, it

might have been worse. If only one could be sure that this were all!

"Sweetheart! When I was young, girls *loved*. I made a love-match myself—a captain in a marching regiment; not sixpence between us. I went over the world with him—my commanding officer, I used to call him; and he died a general. He had no diamonds to give me as a wedding gift, I can tell you; but we loved each other; we had youth and health and high spirits. . . But now—Danton, shall I tell you what Miss Pascal's sweetheart is? The French have got the exact word for such men, as they have got plenty of the original article. He is one of these petty cravies" (so does Mrs. Wynch pronounce the term *petit crevé*). "I wish Colonel Pascal joy of the match. A handsome girl of twenty, and a petty cravy like Chamberlayne for a husband!"

Happily, at this moment, Danton's breakfast enters, and Mrs. Wynch leaves off; it may be hoped, unheard by Leah and Lord Stair, whose murmured conversation in the distant corner of the room still continues.

"Mr. Danton is—a hanger-on in some shape of the house, I believe," remarks Lord Stair. "A relation, or admirer, I think some one told me, of our good Madame Bonchrétien's."

He noticed the flutter of Leah's eyelid, the sudden flush on Leah's cheek, when Danton entered the room five minutes ago, and so would sneer down any possible rivalry without delay. The two men, though living under the same roof, meeting daily, hourly, for nearly three years past, have never been more than potential enemies till this moment—this moment, when Leah's coquetry brings them, at once and for ever, into sharpest collision. Women can seldom be thrown closely together without drifting into friendship or hatred. Men can wish each other

good morning for half a lifetime with no other feeling than that of absolute indifference. "Danton—Danton? Ah, to be sure! lodges in the same house with me—plays the piano—half-headed sort of fellow, with ideas. Was to have been a parson, they say, but could not digest the Thirty-nine Articles; then a doctor, but turned scrupulous as to pills and black draughts. His wife, I am told, preferring bread-and-butter to conscience, ran away from him one fine day. Remarkably sensible of the wife." This would have pretty accurately summarised Lord Stair's opinions; if, indeed, he ever troubled himself to entertain any on the subject of his fellow-lodger. "A man, naturally, with about three inches of brain; lucky as to tailors and posture-masters. Fool and knave in him about evenly balanced. Far too much lactic acid in the blood." This would have been Danton's summing up of George Francis, Lord Stair.

"A hanger-on, or admirer of our good Madame's." Leah continuing silent, Lord Stair thus proceeds. "And, upon my word, I envy Mr. Danton his *bonnes fortunes*. While the rest of us starve on cold cutlets, Mr. Danton gets all his little plats sent hot and steaming from the kitchen."

The tone, rather than the words, imply contempt; and Leah—so influenced is she already by Lord Stair—feels half ashamed of her "conquest" of last night. The feeling is succeeded, almost before it has had birth, by one of those sharp revulsions to which women of her nervous febrile type are ever liable. Looking across the room, her eyes encounter Danton's: he is just sharing a savoury ragout with Mrs. Wynch, and a smile of goodness—of *bonté*, I mean; we have no equivalent for *bonté* in English—lights up his dark face like a sunbeam. Their eyes meet; Danton bows coldly, as a man would bow to any acquaint-

ance of yesterday, and Leah blushes in her very soul—a little also on the cheek, her companion notices.

Until this moment the girl has regarded Lord Stair as the most glorious of her conquests. Jack Chamberlayne, as a prize matrimonial, is well enough. Was not half London, and afterwards the whole of Scarborough, fighting for him—mothers, daughters, aristocracy, commons, alike—when her yellow eyes (a little aided, perhaps, by the strategies of Cousin Bell) carried him off? But it is difficult to feel proud of Jack Chamberlayne, personally. Leah has only to appear at the Bois or at a theatre, with Lord Stair, to be at once distinguished. "Lord Stair!" so people, she feels, *must* speak of them. "And who is his companion?—who is that beautiful woman to whom he is devoted?" Never among her slaves—and she has had slaves since she was fifteen—has she numbered one so redounding to the glory of the moment, the glory dearest to vanity, as Lord Stair. And behold! she blushes, with shame, over herself, over their intimacy, over all that, not five minutes ago, she gloried in! Gifted already with the prescience any genuine feeling confers, she sees herself suddenly—as Danton sees her. Jack Chamberlayne, to whom she is sold; Lord Stair, who is to be the house friend of Jack Chamberlayne's establishment; them also she sees, with a vision not her own. . . . If at this instant the chance of freedom could miraculously come to her, honest love for her portion, and the happiness honest love brings with it, no silks or diamonds, no fashion, no Lord Stair!—

"My dearest Mees," says Bonchrétien's creamy voice over her shoulder. "If Mees could accord me one instant of attention? Milor will pardon us. I have here," handing Leah a sheet of paper, "the names of our little society, as we are to dine."

Leah glances carelessly over the list. "The society will be

all right, Madame, as far as I can see ; only please make one trifling alteration. Just put Mr. Chamberlayne between Mrs. Tomson and Madame de Miramion ; and I dare say Lord Stair, under the circumstances, would not mind taking me ? Yes, that will do better now. Mr. Pettingall and Naomi will make the number even on our side of the table ; and Deb—oh, poor little Deb, in the corner there, away from every one !”

“Mees Deb sit in her corner of predilection,” says Bonchrétien. “Her chair is next M. Danton’s. Mees Deb would rather fail of her dinner than of him.”

“M. Danton ?” repeats Leah, indifferently—as though she had not spoken of Deb purposely to lead up to his name ! “By the way, which is M. Danton’s place, Madame ? I do not see his name on your list.”

Madame gives her eyes a roll, pregnant with meaning, in the direction of Danton ; then, lowering her voice confidentially, “Small chance that M. Danton will be of the society,” she explains. “When M. Danton returns to Paris after a month’s absence, who shall count upon him ? A student in rags, of the hospital ; a dancer, half-starved, of the theatre ; the first one he meets, and who has not the piece of twenty sous in his pocket—dines with Danton at a restaurant. Ah, that is so !” Bonchrétien shrugs her shoulders pityingly. “Danton is Danton ! No changing him.”

“There will be twelve at table as it is, Leah,” remarks Lord Stair, in his slow undertone. “Surely, you would not run the risk of an unlucky thirteenth, upon so auspicious an occasion ?”

For a moment or more, Leah seems to vacillate ; then, abruptly, she returns the paper to Madame Bonchrétien’s hand, rises, and walks to the other end of the room, Lord Stair watching her.

That the girl has taken a sudden fancy to Danton's handsome face he suspects—a fancy! Lord Stair's imagination could not, by possibility, soar higher in the regions of love than this. That it will be a "fancy" widely differing from any sentiment she feels, or ever can feel, towards himself, he is certain. Also, that there is not the remotest risk of its imperilling her fidelity to the Chamberlayne estates. The question is, how to make this fancy, love-fit, call it as you will, work best into his, Lord Stair's own game. For that he has other intentions than the mere pastime of the moment, you may be sure. Lord Stair does not walk arm-in-arm down the Bois with Colonel Pascal, has not borrowed a hundred pounds from Jack Chamberlayne, for nothing. Leah is to be next season's reigning beauty, a twelve weeks' wonder in the Row, a notoriety, eclipsing all the other "peccadilloes of all Piccadilly," and with Lord Stair for her slave—slave, guide, mentor, and most implacable tyrant! It is not the first time he has chalked out, matured, and brought to the bitter end, a precisely similar scheme.

To become the fashion, a woman will sell her soul alive. This is one of Lord Stair's pet beliefs. Curiously enough, he holds another—that a woman has no soul to sell; which, to say the least of it, is contradictory!

CHAPTER VI.

PRINCE CHARMING AT HOME.

"M. DANTON, I have a favour to ask of you."

She stands before him with the loveliest flush of shame upon face; her hands clasped together, her eyes raised timidly,

beseechingly, to his. Very handsome she looks thus ; infinitely handsomer than he gave her credit for being last night. Her skin, that Danton had a suspicion would prove sallow by daylight, is, he discovers, without flaw ; velvety, mellow in tone as the petal of a Bengal rose, and of texture as delicate. Her hair, figure, hands, all surpass in reality the picture his memory had stored of them. And her voice—never, surely, had woman, even a Hebrew woman, a voice more instinct with fine native melody than Leah Pascal's !

And he is repulsed by her still ; repulsed, yet potently attracted. Amidst such wild contradictions do passions, not "fancies," take their rise.

"Surely Miss Pascal need never ask a favour of any man," he answers, getting up from the table and moving a step or two in the direction of the door.

"Because it is impossible for me to be refused ?" she returns, gaily.

"Because it is impossible that you can have a favour to ask. You have only to command."

"And you to obey ? Very well, M. Danton. I command you to dine with us this evening at seven. Papa has asked our friend Mr. Chamberlayne to dinner, and we wish all the people in the house to look upon themselves as our guests."

"You will have a sufficiently large party without me."

"But if I *ask* you, M. Danton ?"

"I have only just returned to Paris, Miss Pascal. My hours are not my own. The first friend I meet in the street——"

"I know. Madame Bonchrétien told me all that. The first student in rags of the hospital, the first dancer, half-starved, of the theatre. But I consider that we have as good a claim as students in rags or dancers half-starved, and I will not accept

the excuse. Are you engaged for this evening — yes, or no ?”

“I am not engaged, formally.”

“And you will join our party ? I command—I mean it would give me such pleasure if you will.”

After a second or two of silence, “I will promise to come readily, on one condition,” answers Danton. Madame all this time is holding Milor’s ear captive, with silken flatteries, Mrs. Wynch is almost choking herself over her ragout. (Grudge not the old soul that ragout, reader ; Nature does but leave this one poor pleasure for our solace, at the last.) “I will come, readily, if you will answer a very simple question. What is your object in asking me ?”

“My—object ?” she stammers, her eyes sinking to the floor. For her age, Leah Pascal’s experience of a certain showily-varnished sort of human nature is considerable. She knows nothing, either by theory or practice, of a nature like Danton’s, and already she fears him, hesitates ; is uncertain whether truth or falsehood will best allure him to her feet. “I hardly understand you, M. Danton. Papa has invited Mr. Chamberlayne, and we hope to spend a pleasant evening, and——”

“What is your object ?” he repeats, looking at her with barely-concealed impatience. “Let us tell each other the truth, Miss Pascal, as far as we can, from the beginning. It will save complications in the end. Why do you wish me to witness Mr. Chamberlayne’s happiness ?”

“I don’t know that there is any very special happiness to witness.” Thus much Leah manages to reply, with tolerable self-possession, but her lips quiver ; her heart beats, as no declaration of love—she has listened to several—ever caused it to beat in her life before.

"And you ask me for my own good, then?" he persists. "Honestly and truly, you believe that I should not show much greater wisdom by staying away?"

No coquetting with this man; try as one will. Love may be got from him; sooner, perhaps, than could be wished. There will be no trifling in the transaction. A Jack Chamberlayne for one's diamond supplier; a Lord Stair for theatres and public exhibitions, generally; a Danton, to play at sentiment with, and befool—Never! For good or for evil, for loving or for hating, Eugene Danton is thorough, and Leah Pascal, actress by nature though she be, artificial through every tradition, every example of her life, recognises this thoroughness, and already bows before it.

"If we only did what was wise, we should do very few things that are pleasant, M. Danton! But, I dare say," she adds, lightly, "Madame Bonchrétien is right. There are much stronger attractions for you elsewhere than any poor little dissipations we can offer—if I only knew."

"If you only knew. Ah, Miss Pascal, if we only knew things that are hidden from us, I should not have returned to Paris till your wedding was over, for certain."

She stands a second or two, irresolute, after this avowal, for an avowal of a kind it is, then turns from him without a word; and Danton, quietly taking up his hat, walks away out of the room and out of the house.

"A très bong coor," says old Mrs. Wynch, looking up at length from her plate. "I know your father and he don't like each other, Miss Pascal, nor my lord neither—how should they? Danton's an honest man." Bitter things have transpired since those roseate summer evenings when Désiré used to bear Mrs. Wynch's snuff-box to "M'sieur le Militairy," at dessert. Send

him her snuff-box! The old woman now cuts M'sieur le Militaire dead, if she chance to meet him on the stairs. "What do you think, Madame?" this she shouts, with emphasis, to Bon-chrétien. "I say Danton's an honest man and true. I don't care who in this boarding-house hears me."

"Ah, ciel! Her eccentricities!" murmurs Madame, scenting offensive aspersions on Milor in the word "honest." "We are all true, we are all honest, Mrs. Wynch—M. Danton and all ze whole society of my house."

"And the very highest praise you can give us, Madame," says Lord Stair, coming across the room to Leah's side. "'An honest man's the noblest work of God,' Leah, is he not?"

"When I know more about the subject, I will give you my answer, Lord Stair," says Leah, coldly. "I have not had much to do with angels, hitherto, except fallen ones."

"Hitherto. But remember you have just made M. Danton's acquaintance."

He adds some remark in a whisper that brings back the smile to Leah's lip, the colour to her cheek. Every chord, save one, in this feverishly-strung, vain, ambitious nature, Lord Stair can touch with a master hand. The girl, like her father, loves money with passion; no difficult task to keep her faithful to Jack Chamberlayne. Like her father, she loves rank, or the distinction rank may confer on herself; no difficult task to keep her faithful (such fidelity as it is) to Lord Stair. For the rest—oh, a cynical word of praise, a pitying disparagement, here and there, will withhold her for the present from carrying her fancy for Danton too far, and at some future day the existence of the fancy may prove rather convenient than the reverse. So judges Lord Stair, coming close to the truth, yet fatally missing it, after the manner of cynics. Have I not said that there is

one chord in Leah Pascal's nature beyond his power to touch?

. . . . The day passes by arrow quick. Alas! each to-day becomes yesterday with fearful haste to Leah now; ere she can collect her own soul sufficiently to commune therewith to-day will be the yesterday of her bridal. A drive with half tipsy little Jack Chamberlayne, Deb doing propriety, in the Bois de Boulogne; a twilight flirtation with perfectly sober Lord Stair, no one doing propriety at all, in Madame's salon; every intervening minute filled up with millinery and the vendors of millinery. A quickly past, on the whole a singularly happy day. Admirers and new fashions suffice, as a rule, for Leah's earthly contentment, and to-day admirers and new fashions both are edged by the expectation of a keener delight. She dresses half an hour too soon for dinner, essays Jack's latest gift of diamonds—is discontented with their effect, puts on her pearls, her sapphires, discards them all. Debbie, in the agonised excitement, herself, of a rose-coloured sash and uncrumpled muslin—Debbie watches these unwonted signs of perturbation on the part of her elder sister, and can draw no other conclusion therefrom than this, that Leah must be falling in love with Jack Chamberlayne in spite of everything.

“If it had only been with Danton!” thinks the child, pausing for a moment as she fastens on her diminutive satin shoe. But then if it had been with Danton there would be no money, no dinner-party, no rose-coloured sash for Debbie, or satin shoes with *real* mother-o'-pearl buttons, like the grown-up ladies wear in the centre of the rosettes!

Considering those rosettes, even Deb, for the first time in her life, turns mercenary, feels that wealth, encumbered though it.

be by a lover redolent of tobacco, and who plays Negro melodies on his chin, is not without its advantages.

Dinner is fixed for seven. At a quarter before the hour Colonel Pascal, in full evening canonicals, awaits his guest upon the hearth-rug (laid down only on state occasions) of Madame Bonchrétien's drawing-room. Evening dress is not, ordinarily, the rule of the house ; but to-night, in honour of the lovers, is to be a ceremony of white gloves, and the ladies are still in the tortures of preparation upstairs. All, save Mrs. Wynch. Fond of good food though the old woman be, she loves the indulgence of her humours better—will dine, shivering, in her own room off a "bully," sooner than accept Colonel Pascal's hospitality.

"A man who will help himself before a lady!" The feud, I may say shortly, commenced over stewed pigeons, Colonel Pascal taking the last piece of breast in the dish, and handing the bones to his neighbour. "A man who will help himself before a lady, who marries his daughter to a petty cravy, who pads, who laces. . . . I thank you, Madame! I have lived under your roof fifteen years, I have had to submit to much ; but I will not lower my dignity to become the guest of an ugly-bred person like Colonel Pascal."

Colonel Pascal is certainly not an ugly-bred person, as far as externals go ; above all, when got up, as at present, for effect, with every assistance that embroidered linen, diamond studs, rings, and a bit of red ribbon at one's button-hole, can yield. No one quite knows what Order of Merit that bit of ribbon represents ; but on the Continent these details matter little, and Colonel Pascal is too thorough a cosmopolitan ever to make his appearance decorated on the northern side of the Channel.

A small swarthy man, not over bald, considering his five and fifty years, with well-dyed whiskers à la Dundreary, keen dark

eyes, a handsome hawk nose, and such a smile—the smile of a man whose heart has not laughed for half a lifetime! Deep lines in plenty have the world, flesh, and auxiliaries, graven round Colonel Pascal's brow and lips; and still he has worn well; thanks to his tailor, dentist, admirable incapacity for feeling, and the serenity of conscience engendered by a fine digestion, looks a dozen years at least younger than he is. For good genial mammon worship, frank readiness of sympathy with all forms of human success, I don't know that I ever met his equal. His presence brings sunshine into the house of every prosperous man he enters—January sunshine, that makes itself seen, not felt. He is indeed the most unfailing weather-gauge of prosperity extant. Get on in the world, honourably or dishonourably, so long as you get on; possess a title, a carriage, a cook; be anything but poor and obscure, and you will find Colonel Pascal the most sincerely appreciative of your friends. Yourself, your taste, your furniture, your children, all are charming! That is his word. A pirouetting ballet-girl does not fall back more surely on the tips of her toes than does Colonel Pascal after every little flight of social rhetoric upon the word “charming.” Delightful weather, wonderful weather, Italian sky, Claude Lorraine scenery—charming! Exquisite woman, shoulders of alabaster, statuesque throat—a waist, an ankle—charming! His daughters have nicknamed him “the Prince Charming.”

“I don't know whether I do right to marry Mr. Chamberlayne,” said Leah, in a moment of expansion, shortly after she accepted poor Jack. “But I am quite certain I do right to get away from papa. Deb's home will be with me; Naomi, with her face, is sure to find a home of her own, and the Prince Charming will be unencumbered. What charming daughters we shall all be—

for conversational purposes ; what pegs for reminiscent sentiment when he knows that he is rid of us for ever." So little valued are men's social virtues, even the geniality of a Prince Charming, when seen in the fierce light that beats around their own fireside.

A quarter to seven ; five minutes to seven ; at three minutes before the hour Leah enters the salon full dressed, the smile that a pretty woman puts on with her bracelets round her lips. Colonel Pascal gazes at her with honest pride ; his daughter, *his* darling motherless girl on the brink of a hundred thousand pounds—and well he may. Never has Leah looked handsomer. Her arms bared to the shoulders, her delicate classic bust, shine like marble amidst the billowy laces and tulle of her amber silk dress ; her bright hair lifted high from her forehead, is ornamented by a single yellow rose ; her complexion, whose one fault, ordinarily, if fault it be, is want of colour, is heightened to-night into vividest carmine and snow. Colonel Pascal thinks of his wife—the lovely gentle-souled wife, whose heart he broke, and sighs ; lifts his handkerchief, even, to the tip of his well-cut little hawk nose.

"That dress becomes you marvellously, Leah. You have the same charming taste as your poor dear mamma. My beloved Esther always chose those faint shades of amber and citron as you do."

Leah walks up to her father's side and surveys herself coolly in the glass.

"I have too much of you in my face, papa dear, to be really like her." What a change comes into her voice when she speaks to him. You could scarcely believe it the same voice that softened and pleaded to Danton six hours ago. "Turn and look now, a little more profile—there ? Did you ever see such a duplicate in your life barring the moustache ?"

The likeness is extraordinary, taking the features from one point of view, and with Leah, for the nonce, counterfeiting her father's expression—an expression that I only know how to describe adequately by the French word *fripon*.

"I hope the likeness is but skin-deep, my child," observes Prince Charming sentimentally. "I trust you will make more of your life, be less heavily weighted, than your poor old father has been."

It is a favourite figure of speech with Colonel Pascal, this of being "heavily weighted;" a vague convenient phrase, by which he throws all the little shortcomings of his life upon circumstances.

"I hope Bonchrétien will give us an eatable dinner," says Leah. "Three francs a head, extra, does not leave much margin for entrées and game. We might have given five francs, I think, papa, when we were about it."

The mention of francs brings Colonel Pascal home briskly from the regions of sentiment to those of facts.

"Three francs a head extra, mind, *extra*—there is the regular subscription of the house to start upon—three francs a head, extra, ought to enable Madame Bonchrétien to send up as handsome a dinner as can be served in Paris, and make a good profit for herself into the bargain. You really forget my means, Leah, when you talk so recklessly, the heavy inroads I have been making upon capital already for your trousseau."

"But the trousseau will be your last expense, papa dear," says the girl, looking at him with coldly glittering eyes. "When the wedding breakfast is paid for, and the cheap champagne, and the narrow white ribbon for the favours, I shall have cost you my last sixpence, remember. Mr. Chamberlayne will henceforth have the exclusive legal privilege of dressing, supporting, adorning, or burying me, as the case may be."

"A wedding is a deuced expensive thing under any circumstances," says Colonel Pascal uneasily. He and Leah do not love each other, know that they do not love each other, at the best of times. There is something in the expression of her face at this moment that is singularly distasteful to him. "I wrote to Turnbull Brothers this morning, telling them to sell out another couple of hundred pounds, and even that will not half carry me through. If you were marrying a poor man—on my soul, Leah, if you were marrying a poor man it would be a much less costly business to me."

"And to me, too, perhaps," says Leah, with sudden pathos in her voice. Then, rallying quickly, "But if I can pay you back," she adds, "if I can pay you back, as I have agreed to do, you will be no loser in the end. The expenses of the sale—the wedding, I mean—are heavy, of course, but if I can make it good to you out of Jack's money hereafter, I will."

"And in the meantime"—Colonel Pascal draws a dingy bit of paper from his pocket, unfolds, and holds it to the light—"this is not the time, perhaps, for domestic discussions, still, as we are talking of expenditure, the matter may as well be settled—in the meantime, I really must request less extravagance in the children's washing bills. Now, last week," he adjusts his gilt double eyeglass, and goes over the items carefully, "'petticoats, tuckers, handkerchiefs, stockings'—here we are—'stockings.' Seven pairs of stockings between those two children, in one week!"

Well for him, perhaps, that he looks so steadily at the paper, that he does not read the expression of his daughter's eyes; such absolute, scarce-veiled contempt as those eyes discover! Leah is mercenary, if you will, but on a big scale; mercenary for the sake of all that money brings, rather than

for money itself ; is bartering her youth for a hundred thousand pounds, but means to spend them ; is mercenary, not a niggard. Perhaps I ought to write, is twenty, not fifty-five. Age makes such a world of difference in the character of our vices.

"And this sort of thing invariably goes from bad to worse. Give them seven pairs one week, they will want ten the next. Are you attending to me, Leah," she is tossing her fan to and fro with an air of the most impenetrable calmness, "or are you not?"

"I am attending to every word, papa. You wish the children to wear dirtier stockings. I will tell them so."

"I wish them to grow up without your ruinous indifference to money. I wish them to feel that they are the children of a miserably poor man. Seven pair a week !—it beats me to know how they could have contrived to put them all on !"

"If you recollect, the weather was rainy, papa. It cannot have been Deb ; I am afraid, poor Debbie does not go out enough to get her feet wet ! But Naomi, you can hardly expect a girl of Naomi's age to be seen in splashed stockings."

"If Naomi looked where she was going she need not be splashed at all. I can walk from one end of the boulevards to the other without a spot on my boots.

"You are a few years older than Naomi, sir."

"I am, and I will employ the wisdom those few years have taught me by bringing up my children in habits of self-control, as honourable members of society. If Deb and Naomi want more than two pairs of stockings a week each, they must wash them themselves, and——"

The door opens with a flourish, and Prince Charming, all embroidery, diamond studs, smiles, and decorations, advances to receive his future son-in-law.

CHAPTER VII.

LEAH'S PRIZE IN THE LOTTERY.

A HECTIC little young man of four and twenty, smooth-cheeked as a woman, fair-haired, honest-eyed, and still with the vacant wasted look about his face of one whose life, moral and physical, has already run to ruin. His language is slang, his dress loud, his manner towards men that of an overgrown schoolboy, towards ladies, simply execrable ; but then, from his cradle upwards, Jack Chamberlayne has been familiar with every phase of attractive society, *save* that of ladies. Such is Leah's lover.

He walks up to her side, giving Colonel Pascal a couple of fingers on the way, and standing so close that his beloved must, perforce, inhale the atmosphere of tobacco and mille-fleurs that enshrouds him, looks her and her dress critically up and down, as a man might do a newly-bought horse of whose paces he is doubtful, then expresses his sense of mingled fear and admiration by a whistle. At which stroke of humour Colonel Pascal, the most fastidious Chesterfield save when a hundred thousand pounds are at stake, laughs pleasantly. Children will be children ; and what are these two young things, so soon to be made one, but boy and girl—April daisies, innocent lambkins of the spring.

Leah shudders and draws away. A new phase of their mutual lives has commenced, silently, unknown to either, in this moment.

The "guests" descend from their various apartments on the upper floors, the dinner bell sounds, and Prince Charming, as honorary host or master of the house, gives his arm to the

Comtesse, a miracle of soft lace and grey silk and fine little high-bred smiles and courtesies. Jack Chamberlayne, sorely against his grain, is apportioned to Mrs. Tom-son, stiff as buckram, in plum-coloured satin, and with what the French call "ribbons that swear," depending from her head and shoulders. Naomi and Deb, in painfully fresh muslins and silk stockings (does Prince Charming behold the washing-bill of the future as he glances at those stockings amidst all the gas-lit grandeur?) Naomi and Deb are both conducted to the dining-room for the first time in their lives like introduced young ladies; Mr. Pettingall and old Major Macnamurdo, their cavaliers. Lord Stair, as the happy result of these combinations, takes Leah.

It is the first time he has seen Jack Chamberlayne's betrothed in evening dress, none of Leah's Paris dissipations having as yet soared higher than a theatre or concert; and before they reach the bottom of the staircase she has learnt what kind of sensation an arm and bust like hers will be likely to produce on jaded London eyes next spring. Whatever his other demerits, Lord Stair, to do him justice, has the knack invariably of leading back Leah Pascal's heart to its rightful allegiance; of reconciling her, I mean, to her engagement and to Jack Chamberlayne.

The chiefs of the establishment await the company in the dining-room; Bonchrétien, in a decent black dress, well made, with a decent black lace coiffure on her head, diffuse of attentions to every one, but as thoroughly self-possessed as though she were a duchess of the old faubourg—a Frenchwoman, in short. Miss Smith has put on a chignon, tacked down a faded green silk—her one company dress—round the throat, and adorned herself with a necklace of cheap pearls. She has also

superintended the making of the sweet dishes, and is a good deal flushed about the face from the work. "Cette pauvre chère Smeet, who fagote herself like a chiffonnière endimanchée," says Madame compassionately: Madame never loses a chance of compassionating Miss Smith's modest efforts at rejuvenescence.

"I arrange the table for thirteen." Bonchrétien whispers this as Leah and Lord Stair go by. "But M. Danton comes not, and it is already five minutes past the hour. I bid Désiré remove the cover of M. Danton?"

"Yes—no—do as you choose," is Leah's answer. "If M. Danton comes, room can be made for him; if not, twelve is a luckier number any day than thirteen."

She passes along, smiling, on Lord Stair's arm, and is in her wildest, her most brilliant spirits throughout the dinner—her heart beating every time a fiacre rattles down the Rue Castiglione, or the heavy house-door rolls to and fro on its hinges. Jack Chamberlayne, who is on the opposite side of the table, thinks he never before saw his beloved look so handsome; and under the influence of her eyes, and of papa's wine, whispers many amative confidences into Mrs. Tom-son's startled ear before the conclusion of the meal.

Out of fairness to Colonel Pascal, I must state that the wines are authentic, almost the only time of his life when as much could be said for him. In all common cases of hospitality Prince Charming treats his friends to the ordinary wine of the house, carefully deposited on wicker sledges for the occasion. For the wedding dinner, even, he is negotiating with his wine-merchant about some delightfully cheap and heady drug to be administered to the guests in the shape of champagne. Will not that champagne be drunk *after* the irrevocable "I wills"

are spoken? But to-night Colonel Pascal feels like a father, and bestows wines that are wines, blessings that are blessings, upon his future son-in-law.

Good wines, good plats; an adoring lover opposite; a friend whispering praises of one's beauty, assurances of his own devotion, at one's side! Leah gradually attends less to the rattling of the fiacres, grows callous as to the opening and shutting of the front door. Her fancy for Danton (I avail myself of Lord Stair's phrase) is, out and out, the strongest emotion her life has hitherto known—is in the stage when a breath, when anything, nothing, may blow it into passion! And still, should Danton not cross her path again, I believe she might get over the fancy in twenty-four hours—aided by an extraordinarily becoming pair of new earrings, perhaps in twelve. Quinine in ague, absence in love; and these maladies we know, if taken in time, are curable. Leah, at all events, is of far too pleasure-loving a temperament to be superior to such anodynes as plats and wines and flattery, even were she much harder hit than is at present the case. Primitive and loyal natures may be found to whom Love, when he has once entered, is all in all. A palace or a garret, as the gods think fit to provide, so long as the object beloved be there! Leah, in the present stage of her moral development, would be glad to have a lover like Danton, just as she would be glad to have any other pleasant things of life; but she would be glad of him with all the accessories that money can give, and failing the lover could console herself with the accessories. I repeat—"in the present stage of her moral development." Till yesterday, remember, she had never troubled herself even to speculate upon the meaning of the word "love."

Danton comes not; but the food and wines are good, and

Leah is looking, and knows that she is looking. her handsomest, and her spirits suffer no eclipse. After dinner enter a couple of oldish young men, friends of Colonel Pascal's *pour faire les fraia*. Friends, do I say? Casual acquaintance of yesterday—the Prince Charming has no friends. Oldish-young men, without ostensible means of livelihood; bachelors, it may be presumed; picked up at a restaurant, on the pavement; picked up cheaply anywhere! Needy gentlemen, irreproachable as to manners and shirt-fronts, who sing a little, dance a little, play cards a little—and wear chains of eighteen-carat brass. Every foreign city abounds in stray utility men of this calibre and of British origin.

Colonel Pascal delights in entertaining upon what he calls the easy French system. No way like the French way for promoting real sociability. You pay people just as much compliment in asking them to spend the evening with you as in asking them to dine—at the expense of a glass of sugar water. He is charmed to see his two friends (though a little uncertain as to which name belongs to which man), charmed to present them to his prospective son-in-law, and to his daughter, and his second daughter, whereupon Miss Naomi, for the first time in her life presented to any one, lifts her eyelashes, and slays both of the casual acquaintance with her beauty on the instant.

These poor gentlemen are absolutely without consequence from a commercial point of view—shirt-fronts and manners the extent, probably, of their worldly possessions. Still, a pauper may serve as a beauty-test as well as an elder son, “golden through and through;” and it warms Colonel Pascal's paternal heart to see the looks of admiration that his second daughter calls forth. Leah splendidly married, Naomi safe to follow in her footsteps, only Deb's washing bills left to pay during the

intervals, few, it may be presumed, when the little girl will not be visiting her elder sisters. . . . The satisfaction good men feel at the successful close of all honest endeavour glows on Prince Charming's face. He compliments Madame on the general serving of the dinner, compliments Miss Smith on the sweets. He falls into little affecting tableaux whenever either of his children comes across him—you may be sure they never come across him, save by accident! He smiles, that frozen smile of January sunshine, on everybody.

Now, how will the young people pass the evening? To dance there are too few; and Mr. Chamberlayne does not care for dancing—drawing-room dancing. Conversation? Jack is not great at conversation, unless he can repose his feet a couple of inches higher than his chin, and smoke incessant short pipes as he talks; and then his themes are not precisely drawing-room ones. Flirtation? But Leah must not flirt with her own affianced lover, and certainly must not flirt with anybody else—it will be quite as well when she and Lord Stair have done puzzling over that solitaire-board in the corner. Music?

"Yes, to be sure, let us have some music," cries little Deb, catching at her father's last proposal. "Jack, you will play for us, won't you? Leah, Jack is going to play 'The Ten Little Niggers.' Will you and Lord Stair please to attend?"

Mr. Chamberlayne's solitary accomplishment is that of evolving sounds that, among intimate friends, pass for tunes, from his own chin. This accomplishment, learned, it may be assumed, in some of the lowest London music halls, has a weird, repulsive fascination for little Deb. Drawing up a stool close to her future brother-in-law's knee, she plants her small figure thereupon, and with her face resting between her hands, sits spell-bound; her dark eyes expressing mingled wonder, admiration,

and contempt, as she fixes them intently upon the performer's face.

Jack's is not an intellectual countenance at any time, and with the forehead held well back, and the chin protruding, as he raps upon it with his meagre knuckles, he forms about as striking an illustration of the great Darwinian theory as could be imagined. Leah's attention to her game of dual solitaire becomes more riveted than ever.

"Capital, indeed, capital!" remarks Colonel Pascal, when the exhibition terminates; for once in his life the Prince Charming's lips refuse to give utterance to any of his favourite superlatives, "A most—um—ah, fatiguing performance, I am sure. Deborah, my dear, you ought not to give our good friend so much trouble."

"But Jack plays on his chin to amuse his own self," cries Miss Deb. "When he was waiting for Leah to get ready yesterday, I came in and caught him playing 'Oh, Jemima,' didn't I, Jack? and no one but old Mrs. Wynch in the room."

"When I am waiting for Leah to get ready, I am glad to commit any foolery," says Mr. Chamberlayne. "Three-quarters of an hour every time a woman puts on her bonnet, is a pretty good strain on a fellow's patience."

The incipient growl matrimonial is in his voice; and in a second the solitaire board is pushed aside, and Leah has flitted across the salon to his side.

"If I am three-quarters of an hour now, when I am on my best behaviour," she whispers, "what shall I be hereafter, when I am on no behaviour at all? There is an interesting sum in the rule of three for your wise old brain to work out."

He is over head and ears in love with her (I apologize to Love; but language is limited, custom arbitrary: we must use,

not the literal, but the French-polish name for things !) and the word "hereafter," spoken as Leah speaks it, with Leah's breath upon his cheek, touches whatever softer emotion Jack Chamberlayne's heart is capable of. He returns her whisper by one that makes her cheek flush. Mrs. Amiral Tom-son, seated beside Madame de Miramion on a distant sofa, raises her handkerchief to her eyes. Mrs. Tom-son, like Jack Chamberlayne, has partaken of as much wine as she can manage, and is now in the stage of semi-tearful, semi-amative retrospection, when the sight of a pair of happy lovers is too much for her nervous system.

"During twenty-two years—twenty-two blessed years—me and Tom-son was all in all to each other." Alas!—verity in wine—where is the fine grammar of the Admiral's widow now? "Love—it wasn't love, it was dotage!"

"So I should imagine, Madame," remarks the icy old Comtesse, moving a couple of inches further towards her own end of the sofa.

The dinner hour was seven; by eleven o'clock not even Leah's smiles can keep Jack Chamberlayne any longer from yawning piteously and aloud. "Music, who cares for music?" he cries at last, waxing desperate. One of the casual acquaintance has been treating the company to a lachrymose English ballad, "Absent," or "Away," or "Always," the kind of ditty gentlemen of his class habitually sing at evening parties, before supper. "What we want is some fun—dressing up, or acting or that—something to set us all laughing. What do you say, Naomi, and you, Deb? Oh, Leah's too fine, of course!" This, with a glance at his betrothed, across the back of whose chair Lord Stair is now bending. "Leah don't like practical jokes;

thinks them low. So we'll just have a lark by ourselves, we three."

Deb and Naomi, nothing loth, jump at the proposal, and away they all run, helter-skelter, upstairs. Half-an-hour later they re-enter : poor little Deb as a devil, in scarlet, with well-corked face, with twisted paper horns ; Jack as a chambermaid, with rouged cheeks, in a cap and bed-gown ; and Naomi, beautiful Naomi, with her hair turned up under a chimney-pot hat, and in a suit of her father's Bond Street clothes, from chin to toe.

"Afraid of the governor," said Jack, when the children hesitated, awe-struck before the proposal of rifling Colonel Pascal's wardrobe. "Why, what is there to be afraid of in him ? Catch the old sinner losing his temper when I am by. Oh, Leah will blow you up, will she ? Take my word for it, Leah won't blow anyone up till after the ceremony on Wednesday, eighteenth instant, six o'clock, p.m."

The travesties are well carried out. For a moment no one recognises either of the three mummies ; then—then everybody seems to become suddenly deadened, and looks uncomfortably at his nearest neighbour to see how the jest shall be taken. The sudden bursting of a practical joke among any party of human creatures above the age of ten (unless the human creatures be Jack Chamberlaynes) seldom fails to bring about this state of universal flatness and depression. Even Colonel Pascal's practised smile does not come at command to his lips.

"Naomi, my dear Naomi, you are really getting too old for such rough play, and Chamberlayne—most diverting, really, ha, ha ! most diverting, but——"

"What we want is champagne, Governor," cries Jack, clapping Colonel Pascal smartly on the shoulder ; the only man living, I should say, who has ever done as much. "Why, hang

it all, everyone is as dull as ditch-water. Give us some champagne, and we will have a dance. None of your quadrilles or Lancers—a good, honest cancan, and I'll take Mrs. Amiral for my partner! Lord!" sotto voce, "won't I make the old girl spin!"

The situation is trying, is, perhaps, the very crucial trial of all that Colonel Pascal's spirit has had to go through during Leah's engagement. Refuse Jack Chamberlayne, he dare not! give him cheap champagne, he dare not. The wretched man, far gone though he be, may yet be sober enough to know good wine from bad.

"My dear Madame Bonchrétien, I am ashamed to trouble you, but if you would let us have one bottle of your excellent Epernay. It is charming, really, to see young persons in such fine spirits, charming."

But not so charming to see the same fine-spirited young persons drinking champagne out of tumblers, and, which is worse, inciting other persons to do the same. Down runs smiling Madame with her keys, up comes Désiré with a single bottle of champagne and half a dozen glasses. The wine does not go round the room.

"Apportez encore—moitié douzaine champagne," cries Jack in his vile French. "And more glasses—big ones. Debbie, what's the French for 'more glasses?' Why, we are only just beginning the evening."

He drinks freely, helps the old ladies and gentlemen, the two pauper guests, with a lavish hand, orders Désiré about as if he were in a tavern. Colonel Pascal sinks in a sort of stupor into an easy-chair, and watches it all. Champagne at ten francs a bottle, and men picked up on the pavement—men invited to a cup of tea, and to be out of the house again in an hour—drinking it like table beer!

Thank Heaven, next Wednesday and the parsons will convert this madman, irrevocably, into a son-in-law! Thank Heaven, to-night is the very last time, in this mortal life, that he, Colonel Pascal, can ever be called upon to entertain him!

By-and-by tongues begin to loosen. The Epernay has done its work. Then one of the pauper guests, he who sang, volunteers to play, and the dancing commences. Jack dances with all the old ladies in turn, singly, two, three together. He carries Miss Smith off her legs; succeeds, by force, in teaching Mrs. Amiral Tom-son the cancan (Debbie tells Naomi, in sacred confidence, that she saw him kiss Mrs. Amiral Tom-son in the back drawing-room). His wild spirits are contagious. Even Lord Stair, at last, puts his arm round Miss Pascal's slender waist.

"We have been wise long enough, Leah. Chamberlayne is right; let us make an evening of it. When you are with children, act like children."

"Or with madmen, like madmen."

So answers Leah laconically. She waltzes with Lord Stair, notwithstanding. The pauper, in a rattling, champagnish fashion, plays well. Madame's carpetless floor is, for dancing purposes, irreproachable. Lord Stair, in his day one of the best waltzers in Europe, is an admirable partner still, as long as the pace is moderate and the waltz not too long. And Leah, in spite of some inward shame, cannot help enjoying herself. Her cheeks flush, her bright hair falls, a little disordered, round her throat. At last, with her two hands clasped on Lord Stair's arm, her eyes upturned to Lord Stair's face, she pauses to recover her breath, just opposite the open door of the front salon; Jack, who has whirled all the old ladies into a state of collapse, Jack, in his female travesty, with his rouged cheeks, his

music-hall palpably vinous demeanour, at her side, fanning her.

Thus Leah stands. Thus Danton, quietly making his way up the stairs, candlestick in hand, sees his Fate again.

CHAPTER VIII.

A DANCE OF DEATH.

A PAINTER'S eye would, probably, be caught by the lights and shadows, the colouring, the artistic humour of the group; a preacher might sigh over its morality. Danton regards it from a widely different standpoint to that either of art or sentiment, and arrives at his diagnosis quickly—diagnosis of the dissecting-room rather than the pulpit.

I have spoken before of Leah's complexion, clearly pale to singularity, but stained by every passing emotion, every gust of temper, with a hue at once too vermeil and too evanescent for perfect health. She is colourless as any marble at this moment, lividly white about the mouth and lips, and all the time with a flush like day-dawn upon either cheek. Her breast heaves unevenly. As she turns, amidst jests and laughter, with that matchless grace of hers, from friend to lover, from lover to friend, you can detect, if your ear be a trained one, the curious, hoarse unevenness of her voice. Poor materials for a career of fashion, these; an organisation wrongly strung for the wear and tear of fast London life, the heats, chills, tight-lacing, insufficient clothing, carbonic acid, sleepless nights, and hard-worked days that the foremost rank in the most advanced of all civilisations has to endure!

And Jack Chamberlayne, what of him? For Danton is at no loss to identify yonder painted travestied figure as Leah's lover: has not Désiré pantomimed for his benefit, with all the verve and malice of a Paris gamin, the refined little saturnalia going on in Madame's drawing-room? Jack Chamberlayne's haggard cheeks flame under their mask of rouge: a fire the reverse of holy is in his boyish blue eyes. His thin, nerveless hands are all a-tremble as, with comical airs and affectations befitting his assumed character, he alternately fans himself and his betrothed, who shrinks from the contact of his breath, and so draws closer to Lord Stair. Suddenly Jack coughs—a short, little rasping cough, that makes him raise his handkerchief to his lips; and Danton can reckon the length of the poor lad's tether pretty nearly as accurately as he computed that of any far-gone hectic patient beside whose hospital stretcher he stood to-day.

So much for the physical outlook of these two people (Colonel Pascal's April daisies) who are to bone of one bone, flesh of one flesh, bound together for happiness or for misery, like living nerves in the same body, till death them shall part!

And the marriage, muses Danton within himself, is what good people call a suitable one. Oh, eternal, inscrutable enigma—"the folly and stupidity of the good!" A fortune, if the bridegroom last long enough to inherit it, for a penniless girl; a handsome wife for a man who has—shall we say, who has lived a *little* fast, and needs the reclaiming influence of sweet fireside affection? If the opinion of science were occasionally asked, in addition to that of exultant chaperons, milliners, lawyers, clerks, and clergy, as to prospects matrimonial. . . . Well, the opinion of science is never asked, and he, Eugene Danton, has no more to do with Leah Pascal and Jack Chamberlayne than

with any other pair of doomed lovers in that Dance of Death called life, amidst which a surgeon, with open eyes and sealed lips, threads his way perpetually.

Hastily extinguishing his candle, he moves aside from the blaze of gaslight that issues through the drawing-room door, and has already advanced as far as the second flight of stairs, when little Deb spies him ; Deb, whose infirmities hinder her from dancing like the rest, and who, sitting alone in a corner, is just beginning to realise that being swathed in a hot scarlet dressing-gown, and having one's eyes filled with cork-dust—yes, and even wearing a pair of twisted paper horns, to look like the devil—does not constitute such very ambrosial enjoyment, after all.

She rushes forward to the doorway, flies after Danton, and gets tight possession of his hand.

"We are having the most lovely party, Monsieur Danton ! Come in and see Madame's salon ; 'tis like the theatre at Christmas. There's Naomi in papa's clothes and a chimney-pot, and Jack dressed like a chambermaid, in one of Rose's caps ; and Jack has been dancing with Mrs. Amiral Tom-son, and some day I will tell you an adventure I saw in the back drawing-room, and I had two wine-glasses of champagne at my dinner ; and this is only my make-up, of course. *I am wearing,*" says Deb, grandly, "a white muslin dress made with five little flounces and a panier, and I have satin slippers, Monsieur Danton, and a new rose-coloured sash."

She leads, drags him, whether he will or not, into the drawing-room ; and Leah, burning with confusion, finds herself forced to introduce Danton to her lover—the painted, noisy, not-three-parts-sober harlequin at her side—her lover !

"Danton !" cries Jack, at no time very clear on subjects

connected with literature, and trebly hazy on all matters just at present, "why, that's the name of the poet laureate, isn't it?—fellow who writes idylls about heaven and hell, and that—or was it the French Revolution, Leah? You left school later than I did. Glad to make your acquaintance, anyhow, Mossou. You must come and stay with us in London; introduce you to all the literary swells, if you care for them; I don't. Introduce you to all the pretty actresses, if you care for them; I do. Have a glass of champagne?"

His claps his hand, with tipsy familiarity, on "Mossou's" shoulder, then, half pushing him along, half clinging to him to preserve his own equilibrium, manages to reach the table, where stand the champagne bottles and glasses. He pours out a bumper for Danton; he drains down half a tumbler full himself; begins to grow confidential.

"It's not often I take to a fellow at first sight, and, as a rule, I can't abide foreigners at all; but," looking at Danton as he speaks with glistening, solemn eyes, "I've taken a fancy to you; by George I have! Bit of a physiognomist—believe in physiognomy; first-rate judge of character, I am. Now look," lowering his voice and touching Danton with his elbow; "you see that old curmudgeon, that old Shylock, my future papa, over there?—tell me what's written on every line of his face, eh? I am to be married to the daughter next week, you know. Italy for the winter. Not by any means sure I shall live through the winter. They must run their chance of that. . . . Take me as I am, without settlements, or not at all. Have some more champagne?—oh, you needn't be afraid, it's honest wine, and I shall be made to pay for it somehow. Danton," in a whisper, "you are a right-down good fellow! Hang it all! a man can't help being born a foreigner, and I don't mind what

I say to you. They are a regular set of sharpers here, sir, from Lord Stair downwards."

He puts his hand under Danton's arm, and staggers away with him to the farther end of the back drawing-room, out of hearing of everybody; Leah, with a sense of shame almost beyond her power of endurance, looking on. She is keen enough to guess what kind of confidence Jack, in his present state, will make—could divine it, even were his glances in the direction of her father and herself less significant; and every expression, every smile that steals across Danton's face costs her vanity a smart. She does not love Colonel Pascal enough to blush for *him*. She certainly does not love Jack Chamberlayne enough to blush for *him*. Her shame is for herself. She desires to stand on a pedestal in Danton's sight; gives him credit—strange to say, when one considers her shallowness of insight—for being a man of "ideals," a visionary who would entertain all sorts of absurd little chivalric notions about women, and the exalted position women should hold. And she has sunk to this already! Before Danton has known her two days, he must pity to the full, as much as he despises her.

"Leah, my love," says her father, with grating suavity, in her ear, "don't you think some music—not dance music, this time—would be agreeable before our little party breaks up?" Under Colonel Pascal's direction, Désiré is rapidly clearing away the wine and glasses, with strictest whispered injunctions to bring no more. "Monsieur—eh—ah—Danton plays, I rather think. Suppose we request him to favour us?"

"Monsieur—eh—ah—Danton is so charmingly engaged already, papa," answers Leah. "It would be a pity, surely, to break in on such an intellectual treat as Monsieur Danton must be enjoying!"

However, she quits her partner's arm—she has forgotten to relinquish it ever since the conclusion of the waltz—and, with her face held high in the air, walks slowly across the room. (Where could old Pascal's daughter have learnt to cross a room with such a grace?" thinks Lord Stair) to Danton and her lover.

Jack having cleared his conscience of much perilous stuff on the score of well-fleeced bridegrooms generally, himself, his loans, his gifts, and the rapacity of the Pascal family in particular—"For Leah is her father, down to the ground, sir! A handsome girl, when she is in a good temper, and a figure—by Jove, I am sweet on the girl, I know! I would go through fire and water to marry her; but come to money, and the blood shows." Jack, I say, having relieved his conscience on these, and several other vital subjects, is fast lapsing towards the melancholy or contemplative stage of intoxication. With his droll little dutch-doll face on one side, his eyes glassy and solemn, his smart muslin cap twisted awry, and his feet perched on a neighbouring chair to the level of his knees, he certainly looks about the most grotesque antidote to love that woman's soul could conceive of, as his mistress approaches.

"Don't you think you have been amusing enough for one night, Mr. Chamberlayne?" says Leah, cruelly. "I have sent the children upstairs. I have told the children to make themselves Human again. Don't you think it is nearly time for you to appear clothed and in your right mind also?"

And she sinks down, her yellow draperies fluttering around her like the wings of a butterfly, upon a low ottoman at Jack Chamberlayne's side.

"If you knew how painfully foolish we have all been this evening, Monsieur Danton," glancing at Danton across her

lover ; "foolish, alas ! without either wit or merriment, you would congratulate yourself, I am sure, upon your good sense in having stayed away."

"I know I wish I had stayed away," cries Jack, candid if not gallant. "Black suit and choker—hate black suits and chokers ! Worse dinner than you get at home : wine served in thimblefuls ; and turned into the street at midnight !" Coherence and vowels are slipping out of Jack's speech fast ; his words trip each other up ominously. "What's a man to do who's turned into the street—midnight—black suit and choker ?"

The problem is evidently one of interest to him. As he works it out mentally, his eyes fixed owlshly on nothingness, his knuckles playing feeble fantasies on his chin, Leah manages to exchange one sentence with Danton.

"Don't . . . please, think worse of me than you can help," she whispers—oh, with what a quiver of the lip !

"If I am wise, I shall endeavour not to think of you at all," is Danton's answer.

Nothing more. Yet both feel that they have spoken their first words of love.

Up fusses Colonel Pascal, pointing out his toes in their patent shoes, with icily polite bow to Danton — not unreasonably anxious, perhaps, as to the chances of his future son-in-law falling down insensible at his fiancée's feet.

"You have asked Monsieur Danton to favour us, Leah ?" Colonel Pascal never loses a chance of calling Danton "Monsieur." "A little music before we break up—ah ! We are all familiar with Monsieur Danton's charming talent——"

"Play for us, will you ?" interrupts Leah, raising her eyes, a sudden light in their yellow depths, to Danton's. "We have

been having noise enough, and to spare, this evening. A few notes of music will do us good."

Danton looks Colonel Pascal coolly and silently in the face. He obeys Leah on the instant. She follows him to the instrument.

"Am I to play for you, or for your father—I mean for the audience generally, Miss Pascal?"

"Oh, for the audience first!" answers Leah, with a blush. She has not three notes of music in her composition, but this only makes his question more flatteringly sweet to vanity. 'You know the sort of showy things such an audience can appreciate, and then you will play something for me—me alone!'

Danton is a real musician. His father, a Florentine of noble birth, trod the boards from predilection—it was his famous *Raoul* in the "Huguenots" that won the heart of the shy young English girl, Danton's mother,—and the son has inherited not a little of his genius. Waltzes, galops, mazurkas, "the sort of showy things such an audience can appreciate"—his fine taste and touch render even these artistic. Lord Stair saunters across the room and stands beside the piano; well-bred, attentive, contemptuous. Colonel Pascal, through his double eyeglass, watches the performance somewhat as one would watch a street boy with a hurdy-gurdy and white mice. The old ladies from the front drawing-room call out, "Very pretty indeed; thank you so much," at intervals. Jack Chamberlayne—

Jack Chamberlayne falls asleep, and is not improved by the condition; few human beings, out of pictures, are. His mouth opens, his jaw droops, his head falls; he gives all sorts of impossible jerks and snorts every time that he recovers himself.

Leah feels—the force of contrast, perhaps—that he was never so repulsive, so absolutely hideous to her as at this moment! At last he fairly rolls from the sofa. Colonel Pascal, hastily advancing to the rescue, suggests that his dear young friend had better change his dress; “tight-lacing does not agree with you, Chamberlayne—a little feminine faintness, eh?” but contrives to get speedily away with him out of the room. Lord Stair, upon this, glances at his watch and suppresses a yawn or two; then, with his accustomed “happy knack of irrelevance,” that great fundamental art of all men and women of the world, makes a sudden retreat to the front drawing-room and the society of the old ladies; and Leah and Danton are alone.

“And now you are going to play for me without an audience?” she asks, leaning so that her voice shall be heard by no ear save his.

(“I wonder whether Miss Pascal knows the unfortunate, I may say the culpable, history attached to the young man, Danton?” whispers old Mrs. Pettingall, mysteriously, to Mrs. Tom-son.

“If things go on like this, it will be some one’s dooty to acquaint her of it,” says Mrs. Tom-son, with after-dinner severity.)

“Yes, I will play for you, if you are sure you have not had music enough already.”

“Enough? I am never tired. I could listen to real music for hours and hours.” Leah’s yawns at a concert are piteous to witness. In the finest parts of an opera she will examine the pattern of the prima donna’s sleeve, or the quality of her lace trimmings, or a head-dress in the stalls, neither listening nor pretending to listen to a solitary note of the performance. “If you only knew the treat music is to me!”

So Danton plays for her a sonata of Mozart's, and plays it gloriously. As he proceeds, the snowy breast heaves, the golden-brown eyes suffuse; she is moved quite beyond the capacity of thanking him by the time he finishes. That is the way, reader, when a woman chances to possess a pair of luminous eyes, a handsome mouth or brow. A strain of music, a picture, a poem, altogether beyond her comprehension—with a lover, actual or in posse, standing by—can kindle her into the expression of so much more emotion than she feels! Poor plain Miss Smith, sitting unnoticed in a corner, her hands stiffly folded in their benzinized gloves, her insignificant grey eyes fixed and tearless—Miss Smith in her soul, I have no doubt, understands and feels the great master's thoughts a thousand times better than lovely Leah Pascal.

But the suffused soft eyes, the heaving white breast, effect their work of subjugation only too quickly. Danton is tolerably on his guard, as a man, against every crafty weapon that a coquette can wield. As an artist, he is weak . . . as an artist! Leah sees this at a glance, and treasures up the newly-acquired experience for future use.

"I dare not ask for another piece now, Monsieur Danton, or for a song, as I should like. They are making such a noise, it would be an insult to Art to ask for more; but some other day, to-morrow, if you could find time, and when the house is quiet. You will not refuse? Music is the best of all medicines, I think, when one's spirit is sick."

"Medicine? I should say few spirits have less need of healing than Miss Pascal's at the present time," says Danton, as he rises from the instrument.

"Yes, that is just the way people judge each other," is Leah's answer. "If we could all know the truth!"—

These are the last words they exchange to-night. Jack Chamberlayne has now returned, clothed, if not in his right mind, to the drawing-room, with Naomi and little Deb, again in the stiff white muslins and silk sashes. The two poor gentlemen, who have really enjoyed their entertainment, six glasses of champagne, better than they anticipated, are exchanging valedictory compliments with their host. Ten minutes later, the whole party has broken up ; and Jack and Leah—who shall say how these things happen ?—find themselves alone in a small vestibule, or cloak room, halfway down the staircase ; Leah bright with smiles, Jack sulkily drawing on his great-coat, and with a cheroot, unlit, between his teeth.

The storm connubial (I use the term prophetically) lowers on Mr. Chamberlayne's brow, and Leah's guilty conscience is at a loss to account for his displeasure. She is really sorry for him, poor fellow !—is jealousy in a lover a crime that a woman ever finds it impossible to forgive ?—helps him on with his coat affectionately—alas ! his weak hands need assistance—gives him his cane, his gloves.

"And are you really, really sure it is wise to walk, Jack, dear ? Now mind you button your coat well up over your chest. I must see about getting you one of those nice Canadian clouds—the evenings are growing so chill. I should not wonder a bit if we have a frost to-night."

"A deuced deal you care about my chest, don't you ?" is Mr. Chamberlayne's gracious reply. "Oh, none of that, thank you," Leah is actually offering to pin his cravat round his throat ; "and if you dislike the smell of smoke, you had better return to the drawing-room. I am going to light up."

"Jack ! *me* mind the smell of smoke," cries Leah, devoted, if not grammatical ; "when you know that I mean to let you smoke

everywhere and always! Why, what is the matter?" putting her face within about two inches of his. "You don't mean to say that you are cross with me again, do you?"

The tone in which she asks this is perfect; caressing, repentant, conciliatory, ignorant of offence, everything a man in love could desire the tone of his adored one to be. Yet it happens that the heart of this particular lover is not reached. Men possessing the bluntest order of intellect have keen intuitions sometimes, the keener, perhaps, from their very lack of reasoning power. Jack Chamberlayne, with all his dulness, knows that Leah is acting, just as well as Leah knows it herself.

"I think, when I am present," he breaks out abruptly, and to Leah's astonishment, soberly, scarcely a trace of champagne left in voice or manner, "when I am present, you might have the good taste to behave yourself decently."

"Jack!"

"I have never looked upon you as better than other people, and I know, cursed well, what awaits me by-and-by. All I ask is, don't disgrace me when I am present. You will do as you like of course, when I am away; but don't make a fool of yourself, and of me, too, under my very nose, as you did to-night."

Surprise, indignation, pity—the semblance of a tear! Leah goes through the little stock repertory of injured innocence; but without marked success.

"Not know!—you know what I mean just as well as I do!" he persists. "Your conduct with that man is shameful. When you are married, I have no doubt you will be—like other married women," growls Jack, between his teeth; "but as an engaged girl, just for three or four days longer, you might try to exist without a flirtation, above all, with such a man as Lord Stair."

"Lord Stair! Oh, Jack, dear, you delicious creature!—you mean Lord Stair?"

"Whom the devil should I mean else?" is the delicious creature's reply. "If there was another man in the house, besides toothless old dotards of ninety, I have not the smallest doubt you would angle for *him* as well."

He simply ignores Danton's existence. A penniless foreign fellow, who can jingle the piano, give dancing lessons, perhaps, or write books—why Leah would 'as soon think of Désiré as of Danton. If Jack had been married a dozen years, he could hardly be more exquisitely unsuspecting of the truth.

"Lord Stair! I flirt with him! You jealous of him! This is too much. Why, look at his age, his ugliness!"

"His age, his ugliness, did not keep Lady Arabella Reid from bolting with him, did they?"

"Please don't make me answerable for Lady Arabella Anybody's sins. I have no intention of bolting with Lord Stair, if you mean that."

"No, I know you have not; you are a vast deal too good a judge to do anything of the sort. It is not always the worst women who bolt."

"Then, would you mind saying what you do mean, Jack? I hate quarrelling, as you know, dear; let us have the whole grievance out, and make it up."

"I mean—that you let Lord Stair say things to you he ought not to say, if you will have it."

"And how in the world can you tell what Lord Stair says to me?"

"Because I know, everybody knows, the things he says to all women. Do you think I have not watched him—yes, and you, too, when you are together? And he is with you too much; he

is with you morning, noon, and night, and, by —, I won't have it any longer ! That's what I mean."

Leah brings her face exactly to the level of her lover's ; she looks, with unflinching steadiness, into his eyes. "Jack, my friend, are you fool enough to think that I—I am flirting, as you call it, with Lord Stair?"

"A deuced good imitation of flirting," answers Jack, surly, yet half appeased. The truth of what she says (veiling that other truth he dreams not of) has made itself felt. "You don't care for him, I dare say. Doubtful," poor Jack ! "if you could care seriously for any man ; but you are flattered by his attentions, and you show him that you are. Lord Stair would not waste his time in running after any woman unless she encouraged him."

"And if I do—if I do make myself civil and pleasant to a man old enough to be the grandfather of us both, what is my object ? I am ambitious, I know. When have I tried to hide any of my faults from you ? I mean to make my way in the London world ; your way, too, Jack, and Lord Stair is just the one person who can help me——"

"Lord Stair and Bell Baltimore," interrupts Jack. "Well, you will be well launched, in all conscience ! the most disreputable man, the most disreputable woman in London for your sponsors."

Leah reddens, but keeps her temper admirably. Nothing like an over-burdened conscience for enabling one to hold one's angry passions in check.

"Bell may be disreputable—I am afraid she is, rather—but, for all that, you were more than half in love with her, sir. If there had been no Mr. Baltimore in the world, I am quite sure you would have proposed to Bell, not me."

"If there had been no Mr. Baltimore," says Jack coolly, "I am quite sure Bell would have proposed to me for herself, instead of——"

"Don't hesitate, pray—instead of for her friend. It was our side, really, who made the offer, was it not, Jack? You did not follow us wherever we went; you were not jealous of every other man who looked at us; you tolerated our attentions simply! And then, one fine day, Bell hinted to you that my peace of mind was wrecked through your fascinations, and you consented, out of pity, to marry me. That was it, was it not?"

She holds her lovely face, soft with smiles, up to his, and Jack Chamberlayne takes her in his arms and kisses her, the quarrel ending precisely as so many of their quarrels have ended before. . . .

And still the reconciliation is but skin-deep, kiss-deep. Before the house-door has closed upon him, Jack Chamberlayne knows that he has been befooled. The very second Leah finds herself alone, her heart gives a great leap of joy.

That kiss—well, 'twas nauseous, but it bought peace. And to-morrow, and to-morrow, and every rosy-hued morrow, until liberty be taken from her for ever, she and Danton will meet.



CHAPTER IX.

SI TU SAVAIS.

AND to-morrow, when it comes, is to-day, rosy-hued no longer. Work-girls with unfinished fineries—no ordering a trousseau from Roger or Vignon for a daughter of Colonel Pascal's: Leah has had to buy every item of her dress in the cheapest possible

market, has had to hunt up the smallest milliners from the most unfashionable quarters—work-girls with unfinished fineries; the great washing-bill question fought out in detail between Naomi and her father; the half-cold twelve o'clock breakfast, dawdled over at Lord Stair's side; the afternoon drive and love-making in the Bois; the theatre in the evening, Jack Chamberlayne and Lord Stair both in attendance . . . and not a glimpse of Danton. The next day, the same routine again, and the next. Then comes Sunday, October the 15th; three more days she starts for the Italian Lakes, in the society of Mr. Chamberlayne; and still she sees him not!

Fate, however, perversely propitious, ordains that Sunday, the 15th, shall amply make up for the wasted week-days—through Deb's agency. Ailing at all times, poor Deb is subject periodically to attacks of the most intense headache—attacks that doctors and doctors' stuff are powerless to avert, and during the continuance of which her only solace is to lie in Leah's arms, and moan or shriek, according to the violence of her suffering. Colonel Pascal makes it a rule to walk straight out of the house the moment any member of his family is taken ill, his sensibilities being altogether of too fine a texture for rough everyday use. Naomi is just a little worse than useless. If the contemplation of a face, perfect and cold as a tinted statue, could alleviate pain, Naomi would possibly not refuse her services, for half an hour or so, in the sick-room. It happens, however, that the mere sight of this "thing of beauty" drives the poor small patient to distraction. Deb wants the pressure of a cool hand on her forehead, wants her temples bathed, wants patient loving arms to uphold her; in a word, wants Leah, and has her exclusively. If Leah were ready equipped in plumes and train for a first court presentation, an attendant admiring

viscount on either side, I verily believe one of Deb's headaches would have power to restrain her from going.

Unhappily, our virtues—her love for Deb may be reckoned as Leah's one virtue—snare us to the full as effectually as our sins. On the night succeeding Colonel Pascal's dinner-party, Danton with a self-control not very frequently shown by men in such cases, resolved deliberately to strangle his liking for Colonel Pascal's daughter, while yet it remained a liking. It was love for a woman of her type that wrecked his life at one-and-twenty. Surely he has wisdom enough to steer clear of such a peril now. He will see the girl, put himself within the reach of her coquetry no more, keep away from the house, if need be, every day until her wedding, then—drink healths, throw old shoes with the rest (suffer a pang, perhaps when he gets a last glance of those eyes of hers at Jack Chamberlayne's side), and forget her, or, at least, think of her only as a moneyless man may do of a picture, racehorse, or any other object of luxury too dear for his possessing. So Danton resolved, and, carrying out his resolution, has not once encountered Leah during the past two days. To-day, Sunday, he means to go down to some artist friends at Fontainebleau, and take an eight-and-forty hours' holiday, thus further putting the possibility of temptation out of his path.

. . . . Well, mid-day breakfast is over. Danton's train starts at two; there is barely time for him to run up to his room, write a letter, and be off—out of harm's way and into the good October weather, the crisp, fresh forests, and the anti-sentimental society of his artist friends, till Tuesday. He sings, for the man is really heart-whole yet, the old refrain, "Oh, ma maîtresse!" He is just hurrying by a door he dreads, and yet which he can never pass without a certain hope of seeing it un-

close, when Debbie's voice, weak and querulous, arrests him. Debbie's voice and then another, sweet and low as any that ever wept beside the waters of Babylon—the voice of Leah.

Deb's attack has now passed from paroxysms of sharp pain to the stage at which she demands amusement; constant stories, told in the softest of undertones, short, vivid, dramatic, new; that is the grand essential for poor Deb—*new*. And Leah is curiously unimaginative. Bright in conversation, quick at appreciating and reproducing the thoughts of others, she is absolutely devoid by nature of the faculty of invention. But what will not love do? In the intervals between Deb's illnesses—this is truth, Reader; it does me good to write it—Leah searches every newspaper she comes across for such scraps of literature as the child affects, and gets them patiently by heart for future use. You shall judge what kind of literature this is.

"Tell me something new," says Deb wearily, Danton listening the while. "Something of my sort—theatres or wild beasts killing any one, or like that."

"Well, Debbie, you know about the tiger——"

"Who ate the boy in the City Road? I've heard it scores of times. You never know anything new, now," says poor Debbie impatiently. "Before you were engaged, you used to tell lots of nice things, but now——"

"Debbie, you have not heard about the famous clown who is acting in London. When I am married, you shall come and stay with me, and we will go together—only you and me—to see him."

"Oh, I've seen the clown so often," says Deb, fretfully still, but with awakening interest in her tired voice.

"Not this one. Why, Debbie, hear what he does." And Leah falls back upon her lesson, learnt from the advertise-

ment in the *Times*. “‘Amidst the breathless excitement of all present, this clown of clowns takes the incredible leap of thirty-five feet’—double the length of Madame’s drawing-room, Deb—‘across the arena. This single feat worth double the entrance money. His legs alone a study.’”

Being, as I have said, unimaginative, Leah stops dead short the moment her lesson is repeated. But Deb can happily supply any deficiencies to her own satisfaction. Deb is overflowing with imagination, and with those big eyes of hers sees into the unseen in a manner the grown-up men and women who surround her wot not of.

“‘His legs alone a study,’” she repeats, after lying quiet for a moment or two. “‘Mustn’t that be grand, Leah? Double the length of Madame’s drawing-room. . . . Ah, I see it all! One, two—he is off!’” Stretching up her little thin arms in the air. “‘He flies—no, he falls—no, it’s nothing. Oh, Leah, how frightened I was! Just feel; I have turned all wet and cold with fright.’”

“Well, don’t think about the clown any more,” says Leah, laying her hand soothingly on the child’s forehead. “We will talk about the clown when you are stronger. Do you know that your bridesmaid’s dress came home last night, Debbie? Cerise and white, and a long, long tulle veil to your feet.”

No answer at once; then, “I wish some one would die between this and the wedding,” says Deb. “Any one, I don’t care who, as long as it was not you.”

“Or you,” says Leah quickly, and stooping over, kisses her.

The door stands ajar; and Danton, by this time, has moved into such a position that he can not only hear her voice, but watch her face.

"As well die as live alone with papa and Naomi. Oh, Leah, Leah, why did you ever say 'Yes' to Jack Chamberlayne?"

Silence. Deb's eyes fixed intently on her sister; Leah sinking to the floor. At last, "Why did I ever say 'Yes' to Jack Chamberlayne?" she begins a little tremulously. "As much for your sake, Debbie, as for my own. Papa . . . is our father, so, of course, we will say that he is very nice."

"Oh, very nice indeed," interpolates Deb, her pinched face weirdly sarcastic.

"But—he is not fond of his daughters. How could he be? How could a man who was not fond of mamma be fond of us? Well, he dislikes Naomi the least, perhaps; and Naomi is certain, whatever happens in life, to fall on her feet. But you, Debbie," snatching the child with a sort of passion to her heart, "my marriage will be everything to you. You want country air and green fields, you poor mite!—I declare you don't weigh as much as you did when I went away—and new milk and a pony. I know, every doctor has told me, what you want. And you shall have it all! Yes, Deb, and a fine little riding-habit made by the tailor. My dear, when I am married, you shall never be cooped up in a boarding-house any more."

The words pony, new milk, green fields, act on poor Deb like some magic stimulant. She starts up, looking more like a dead child than a living one, declares her headache gone, and, for the first time for hours, creeps down out of Leah's stiffened arms. And now M. Danton judges the moment come to give notice of his presence, by a subdued professional knock at the half-closed door.

During the past five minutes, every feeling of his heart, as regards Leah Pascal, has taken new colour and force. He has hitherto admired her physically: tolerated her—as men do

tolerate pretty women—mentally ; shrunk from her, morally. And behold ! at once she has become harmonious in his sight ; her faults, and they are many, are condoned. The sordid commonplace life seems set in tune. Leah can love ! He walks into the room, in obedience to Deb's shrill "Entrez !" and sees her pallid and untidy, the remains of her scarce-tasted breakfast on a table beside her, the floor plentifully strewn with silks, ribbons, and such like millinery litter of every hue and kind."

"Monsieur Danton !" Instinctively Leah's hand goes to her hair. Alas ! Nursing is directly antagonistic to modish coiffures ; the coronet of golden plaits is pinned at least half an inch awry. "Debbie, how could you ? I felt sure it was Désiré."

She rises, flushing rosy red, and in this flush, and her untidiness, and with her eyes worn and tired, looks lovelier than she has ever done before in Danton's sight.

"My visit is to Deb—a professional visit," he remarks gravely. "What have you been doing with yourself, Deb, to have one of your headaches again so soon ? Too much champagne on Thursday evening, too much gas and excitement every evening of the week, I suspect."

Danton addresses the child, but he is holding Leah's hand, is looking into Leah's face with a grave interest that makes her pulses leap.

"I was taken bad at nine, and it is now past one," cries Deb, with importance. "And I have been in *torture* all the time, and I wanted to send for you, sir, only Leah would not——"

"Debbie, my dear !"

"You would not, Leah—you would not. You said Monsieur Danton did his best to keep out of our way, and, even to please

me, you were not going to run after him ! That is what Leah said, Monsieur Danton ; and now you have come all of your own accord ; and you will stay a long, long time, won't you ?”

She makes Danton seat himself in an easy-chair, then climbs upon his knee, and rests her hot head on his breast. He feels the weak, thready little pulse, asks one or two professional questions, inspects her tongue.

“If Deb were to run wild in the country for a year, we should have no more of these headaches, Miss Pascal. The physicians Debbie wants are fresh air and exercise.”

“I know that,” answers Leah. “When I live in England, I mean——”

“France would suit the child better,” interrupts Danton, quickly. “Climate, soil—everything here would suit her better than England. I know half a dozen honest country people within reach of Paris, who would be glad to take her in charge.”

“Oh, but when Leah is married I must be near London !” says Deb. “You are going there, too, you know, Monsieur Danton. You say you will be surgeon some day at one of the London hospitals, so I shall be near you both. And Leah has promised to buy me a pony, and a little riding-habit, made by the tailor, out of Jack's money.”

Leah flames scarlet.

“I am outbid, Deb,” says Danton, stroking the child's cheek kindly. “My poor country people might give you new milk and apples, and an occasional ride, perhaps, on a carhorse. A riding-habit made by the tailor is quite beyond my mark. Riding-habits made by tailors mean money, little Deb.”

“I wish there were no such thing as money in the world,” cries Leah, her fair face kindling with a light so nearly resemb-

ling truth that Danton is fain to believe her words for the moment.

"And I wish there was money without the people the money belongs to," remarks Deb. "If just we three could be rich, without anybody else, we three, in a house, alone, and——"

"Monsieur Chamberlayne waits below," announces Désiré, peering with his mocking gamin face round the door. "Monsieur Chamberlayne will attend these ladies for their drive in the Bois."

Danton rises discreetly. "I am really not wanted, Miss Pascal," he remarks, with sudden assumption of the manner *Æsculapian*. "If there is any return of the headache, you will let me know. I am not very far distant."

"Wait, at least, until we have had our talk out, M. Danton," she says to him, lowering her voice. "It is so seldom I can get any one to give me a real opinion about poor Deb. Et vous, Désiré, dire à Monsieur Chamberlayne"—Leah's French verbs are something fearful and wonderful: it is a theory of Colonel Pascal's that handsome girls are better without education—"Dire que mon petit sœur est malade. Je n'aller pas sortir aujourd'hui."

"Mon petit sœur est malade." Désiré repeats Leah's murdered genders aloud with infinite gusto, as he whirls, imp-fashion, down one flight of stairs after another, and has the keen happiness of sending off M. Chamberlayne, boiling over with anger, from the house. He further enjoys himself by making all the mischief possible with Lord Stair. Milor, just starting for his afternoon lounge in the Rue de Rivoli, chances to be in the entrance hall when Leah's message is delivered to her lover. He lingers after Jack has driven away, questions Désiré minutely as to the seriousness of the child's illness, the nature of

her medical attendance, and ends by learning considerably more than he expected. Désiré's imaginative faculties are lively; his tongue is pointed. True child of the Paris streets, he can hardly speak without being epigrammatic, is never epigrammatic without being malicious. Lord Stair, not ordinarily a lavish man with his money, glides a twenty-sous piece into Désiré's dingy palm before starting for his walk.

And Leah and Danton? Reader, they spend the afternoon together, and they do not employ their time in the exclusive discussion of Deb's headaches. Before Désiré has well reached the bottom of the stairs, Leah remembers—"Ah, she fears M. Danton has forgotten!—that promise of his to play for her, without an audience. And when Debbie has been ill, music soothes the child better than any physic, and . . . and what a pity it is there is no piano nearer than the drawing-room. If one could only have a song or two, without the society of the old ladies and Major Macnamurdo!—"

"You can have as many songs as you like by coming to my room, scarcely six yards distant," says Danton; "and Deb shall have grapes. You are well enough to eat grapes, Debbie? I thought so. The thing is settled."

Deb runs on without waiting for a second invitation; but Leah—let me do her the justice of saying this—Leah hesitates. She is not scrupulous overmuch, as to remote moral contingencies; quails not before the risk of endangering her own peace of mind, of jeopardising Danton's happiness. That she feels for him as she never felt for man before, she knows full well; the surrender of liberty, the journey to the Italian Lakes only three days distant! But her excitement-loving nature, avid of pleasure or of pain, makes her court rather than shrink before danger like this. What she fears, mortally, is—not he

own weakness, but the discovery by others of her weakness. Let the distraction of the moment be attainable by thoroughly safe, though tortuous means, and there are few people apter at improving opportunity than Leah Pascal. At the mere suspicion of outraged conventionality, she is a coward. "A handsome girl is a saleable commodity, worth so much in the marriage market. An unmarried girl, by committing one open breach of social decorum, lessens, or runs grievous chance of lessening, her own money-value. And money is lord over all; and in forfeiting money, you forfeit everything." This is the creed in which Leah's soul has been reared—or starved. The keen satisfaction of accomplishing Danton's conquest, nay, the delight, more exquisite still, of surrendering herself to this new wild foretaste of love's intoxication, pale before the master-principle, the great acquired instinct of her life—circumspection.

"Don't go on so quickly, Debbie; wait for me." She says this in answer to some question she reads on Danton's face. 'Perhaps it would be wiser, Monsieur Danton, to go down to the drawing-room?'

"Why? My piano is in better tune than Madame Bonchrétien's."

"And you have no old ladies in your room—fearful temptation! and you have grapes for Deb."

"And some Gloire de Dijon roses for you. Come."

Danton takes her hand, draws it within his arm, and leads her away captive: just at this one moment, I believe, "had the fate been with them that has not been," might lead her to the other end of the world—to a happier, lowlier lot than any she shall know! "I am overbearing to the people I like," he remarks: "sick people, most of them, or wise men and women,

the age of Deb ; but I don't know what right I have to command you."

"It gives me pleasure to be commanded," says Leah. Involuntarily she thinks of the weak purposeless life with which her own is to be bound up, for all this side of eternity. "Nothing is so delightful as to have responsibility forcibly taken off one's hands, as you are taking it now."

"You had better let me take and keep it always," says Danton, half jestingly, half in earnest.

For an instant Leah's face is bright with smiles. Then, recollecting herself : "You would soon repent of the bargain, I suspect," she answers, a little gravely. "Whoever undertook to be my conscience-keeper would find the office no sine-cure."

"I spoke of taking responsibility off your hands, Miss Pascal. Let me guide your actions, and I am quite ready to become your conscience-keeper afterwards."

"I think you two walk very slow," cries out little Deb. "If you don't make haste, Leah, I shall eat all Monsieur Danton's grapes before you come."

Danton's apartment is the pleasantest one in the house : on the strength of two small inner cabinets, which serve for sleeping and dressing-rooms, Madame Bonchrétien calls it a suite. "One of my permanent inmates, the Count Danton" (Madame confers titles on her lodgers at discretion), "occupies a suite of rooms on the third floor." The windows look south, towards the gardens of the Tuileries, and have carefully-tended boxes of mignonette and geraniums outside. Book-shelves, well filled, engravings, most of them of theatrical celebrities, are on the walls ; a piano stands open in one corner ; before the fire is wheeled a luxurious, sleep-inviting sofa, among the cushions of

which little Deb has already nestled herself. A lingering odour of tobacco pervades the apartment. Pipe-sticks of all sizes and nations, a faded white satin slipper, now used as a tobacco-pouch, are above the mantelshelf. On the centre table, in addition to a glorious bunch of roses, stand a basket filled with autumn fruits, and a bottle or two of wine. Danton lives—not like a Sybarite, but like a man who has discovered that life's best happiness is work, and that a grand help towards the achievement of work are creature comforts.

And creature comforts come to him so easily, with "*cette pauvre chère Smeet*" living under the same roof. He returns home, fagged from the hospitals, and cool air and open windows greet him in summer ; in winter, a blazing fire, closed shutters, and books and papers, left *as he left them*, on his table. If Miss Smith lack other more brilliant qualities, let this extraordinary virtue be recorded of her : she can set a room in order, yet leave books and papers intact ! Fruit and flowers are sent to him throughout the year. M. Danton does not practise in Paris. At more than thirty years of age, he is a student still. But he gives his services gratuitously to his friends, penniless artists, half-starved chorus singers, and the like ; and his friends repay him with such small offerings as their means command—and boundless gratitude ! On a hundred and fifty pounds a year—this is the amount of his income, I should say, of his annual expenditure ; "*income*," he has none—Danton considers himself, not without reason, a rich man.

"I did not know that any room of Bonchrétien's could look like this," cries Leah. "Why, Monsieur Danton, you must be a millionaire. What fruit ! what flowers !"

"The roses are fine, are they not ? They are a present from a poor little woman who . . . well, never mind ; perhaps you

would have nothing to do with my roses if I told you too much. Now, choose ; take any, or all, if you will."

"That is a poor compliment to the sender," says Leah, bending her face down over the flowers. "If your friend knew how you treat her presents, sir?"

"My friend cares for my pleasure only, Miss Pascal, and nothing can give me so much pleasure, just now, as to see you pleased."

Leah, upon this, selects two or three of the finest roses in the bunch, and fastens them in her dress. She has accepted a great variety of flowers, from a great variety of donors, in her time, and you may be sure knows how to infuse the most delicately subtle flattery into her manner of doing so. Yet, to watch her little conscious blush and flutter, a simple observer would declare she had never listened to a word of love, never encouraged a lover's hopes, before this moment. But Danton is not quite blind yet: his time is coming on lightning quick; every five minutes they pass together his senses become more hopelessly enslaved by the ineffable charm of Leah's face and voice. But he is not absolutely blinded; he can detect the actress in her still; can smile to himself over the very lures and artifices which will inevitably work his own undoing.

"I never feel quite sure about you, Monsieur Danton," she remarks after a quick glance at his face. "You are exceedingly kind and flattering to me with your lips, and all the time I don't like the expression of your eyes. I wish I could be sure of you!"

"I wish I could be sure of myself, Miss Pascal," is Danton's answer; this time in a tone which the most hardened coquette in Europe could scarcely affect to misunderstand.

Ah, well, how quick the hours, the happiest hours of Leah's

life, go by ! Debbie, worn out, curls herself into a corner of the sofa, when her grapes are eaten, and falls asleep ; such sympathetic chaperons are little sisters of eleven ! And then, in hazardingly close proximity, they look over Danton's photographs, and Leah admires, but cavils at, the portrait which she is supposed to resemble. Too handsome, too handsome, by far, to be like her ! When did she ever pretend to possess a Grecian profile, a pair of faultless lips ? And yet she is vain enough to say, does Monsieur Danton agree with her, that her eyes have a different expression in them to *that woman's* ? The question suggests an argument on beauty, generally, which leads to a dissection of Leah's features, one by one, with pitiless analysis by Danton of their defects. And then, after a time, they have music, soft music, not to disturb poor Deb ; just a couple of French romances, the "Serenade" of Schubert, and "Si tu savais," but that serve only too well to further the other little living romance on hand.

"Si tu savais." . . . Alas ! Leah has learned it all too quickly, has gone through a cycle of mute teaching during the past couple of hours. Standing beside Danton as he sings, with that dangerous southern voice of his, Leah knows that she loves, and with a fool's insensate passion ; knows that to feel the pressure of his hand, to exchange one kiss, one trembling word of hope, were heaven—quickly followed by the hell of poverty, the forfeiture of toilettes, fashion, all that her excellent marriage, the wisely-ordered sale of youth, nature, honesty, promises to bring !

Six o'clock clangs out loudly from the Madeleine, and at the same instant commences Désiré's energetic ringing of the first dinner-bell downstairs. With a start, Leah comes back from romance to fact, remembers that she and Danton have been

alone three hours or more, and, waking up Debbie hastily, rushes away to her own room to prepare for dinner. The dress she chooses—Danton and she will be likely to remember that choice until their life's end—is a black silk, thickly covered with tiny yellow mouches, or beetles; a silk that has seen long service, but that becomes Leah's rich-hued, Eastern beauty to perfection, as she knows. A necklace and cross of amber, the Gloire de Dijon roses at her waist-belt, and she looks divine; the first clothes-artist in Paris could not improve her by a single touch. Let her put on what she will, hastily or after a couple of hours' rehearsal, you always feel that Leah Pascal is in the attire that suits her and the occasion as nothing else would. The girl may love, marry, conduct her earthly affairs, or choose her heavenward path, by the light of reason; she certainly dresses by inspiration, pure and unalloyed.

"If you had only known Monsieur Danton before you said 'Yes' to some one else," cries Deb, watching her with big fond eyes. It is about the hundredth time poor Deb has harped upon the same futile "if."

"Better late than never, Deb," answers Leah, lightly. Her spirit is buoyant, her heart gay as the roses she wears; she is heedless of yesterday, of to-morrow, of everything in space or time, save what the next three or four hours may bring forth. "We cannot help our ultimate fate, but we can laugh at fate as long as possible. Don't look so wise, Deb; and put on your new sash, child, it will do your headache good. Monsieur Danton and I are the very last people in the world to be lovers, but we may be excellent friends, he and I, and you, too, my pet, notwithstanding."

"And Jack?" says Deb appositely. "Isn't Jack to be excellent friends, too?"

"Oh, Jack will be—a great deal more than a friend, of course," answers Leah. And she changes colour, and becomes grave. The sound of Jack Chamberlayne's name has produced a curious effect on her. Walk abroad in the country on one of those hawthorn-scented mornings when every breath you draw seems a new lease of hope and life, then suddenly hear a death-bell toll across the sunny fields, and you will know the kind of effect I mean.

Sunday is always a quiet evening at Madame Bonchrétien's, and this evening it is exceptionally so; only eight people at the dinner-table. Colonel Pascal, at the first mention of his little daughter's illness, absented himself, overcome by his feelings, from the house, and is not likely to leave the shelter of his club until midnight. Bonchrétien has gone, for four-and-twenty hours, to a sister at Versailles, carrying away Naomi Pascal with her. Even to Naomi, obnoxiously hungry, nourished at half-price though she be, Madame Bonchrétien is lavish of civilities under the present golden prospects of the Pascal family. Mrs. Amiral Tom-son dines out. Old Mr. Pettingall attends the evening service of his church, having made his dinner at lunch-time, according to his invariable Sunday custom.

"Quite a small family party, are we not, Leah?" says Lord Stair, rubbing his white hands and looking more than usually amiable—about the lips, rather than with the eyes—as Leah and Debbie enter the dining-room, Danton with them: I don't know how this accident happens. "Ah, Danton, how are you?" It is almost the first time he has addressed Danton during the two years they have sat at the same table, certainly the first time he has done so without the prefix of "Monsieur." "A thousand pities Madame Bonchrétien cannot limit our party to

this number always. We should have opportunities of getting to know each other more intimately."

And he continues in the same pleasant, talkative mood throughout the whole of dinner. Secretes almonds, and sweet biscuits, playfully, for Deb (Lord Stair playful! *has* the undertaker measured him for his coffin yet? thinks Deb with a shiver); talks politics, or as much politics as men ever talk in Paris, with old Major Macnamurdo; helps Mrs. Wynch to the entire breast of a fricasseed chicken, and orders a pint bottle of Mœt for himself. Were Leah less thoroughly absorbed in her own fast-multiplying emotions, such unexampled geniality upon the part of Lord Stair might well afford her ground for suspicion.

Immediately after dinner the society separates. Lord Stair, pleading an engagement, leaves the house; the old ladies, doubly sleepy by reason of its being Sunday, creep away to the drawing-room; and then, with Deb in her arms, Leah prepares to mount the hundred and one stairs that divide the rez-de-chaussée from the third floor. Not, however, until she has exchanged a whisper, as she passes, with Danton, a whisper that poor little forsaken Miss Smith notes and sighs over!

Debbie, never a ready sleeper, is trebly long in shutting her eyes to-night, more exacting than usual in the matter of Leah remaining beside her pillow and talking her into drowsiness with stories. "I know very well you want to go, Leah. I can see by your face you want to be off," holding her fast, prisoner, with her small hot hands. "And this one evening I thought I should have you to myself—Naomi away, and no horrid lovers about, and papa at the club. Pray what was all that long whisper of Monsieur Danton's?"

"Whisper of Monsieur Danton's," repeats Leah, innocently.



"Let me see—why, that there was a talk of another war; oh, no! that was what Major Macnamurdo said. As far as I can remember, Monsieur Danton made some brilliant remark about the change in the weather, but I am not sure."

"Leah, if I try, honour bright, to go to sleep, will you solemnly promise to stop by my bed afterwards?"

"Well, of course, I must run down for a cup of tea, Deb; nothing more."

So Leah evades the promise, not without some pangs of self-reproach: then, the moment Deb's breathing announces that she can move with safety, glides her arm from beneath the child's pillow, and makes her way swiftly as her feet will carry her, down to the drawing-room.

It is now close upon ten o'clock. Mrs. Wynch, Madame la Comtesse, and Major Macnamurdo are dozing in their chairs; Miss Smith, greyer and gloomier than usual, sits in her place of office, behind the tea-cups. Beside a window in the farther corner stands Danton. The night is like July; one of those delicious, hot, still nights which gladden the world occasionally in late autumn—our faithless mistress, summer, mocking us with one last kiss before she departs! Leah drinks her cup of tea, and forces Miss Smith into conversation; she makes the circuit of the salon, and has something pretty to say to everybody; and then, accidentally, she finds herself near a window that stands open, becomes aware, for the first time, of M. Danton's presence, and stops short. If Miss Pascal had studied strategy under Von Moltke himself, she could not have executed this little masked flank-movement more neatly.

"Monsieur Danton, positively you have one of Madame's windows open after six o'clock. The establishment will go to the bad if this sort of laxity is allowed."

She joins him, and they watch the stars together (and each other's faces); presently lean forth a space, to breathe a fresher atmosphere than that of the salon: presently wish it were not too late to take a turn, just a quarter of an hour's turn, round the gardens of the Tuileries. You know the kind of easy gliding pace at which the journey along the downhill road invariably commences!

"Too late, and why too late?" says Danton at last. "It is barely ten o'clock yet, Miss Pascal. If you like to put yourself under my charge, we can walk half the length of the Champs Elysées, and be back by eleven. You really want exercise after all your nursing; take my professional advice."

"If I could be sure nobody would know," says Leah, glancing round at the three nodding old people; "if one could be positive Lord Stair was out of the house; and if it were not for Deb."

When a woman urges only one objection, there may be a chance for her: when she can think of three or four insuperable barriers to the carrying out of her own wishes, she is lost. Leah is lost, as far as a ten-o'clock unchaperoned walk in the Champs Elysées may be said to constitute perdition.

"I really don't think I should mind, but for Deb," she hesitates, two words from Danton having swept away all other obstacles. "If Deb should wake——"

"I will answer for Miss Smith being in her room."

He crosses over, upon this, to Miss Smith's side, and with a whisper electrifies her. Love may be Platonic or the reverse; jealousy is jealousy always. Miss Smith, in an instant, realises Danton's danger as clearly as she foresaw it the first evening of his return to the Rue Castiglione.

"My dear Monsieur Danton, anything you ask me to do is,

of course, a command. But for you and Miss Pascal to venture out at this hour alone ! It is unheard-of, incorrect, and a very great risk, under the circumstances, for Miss Pascal."

"Yes, you will go up to the child's room, will you not, and stay with her till her sister's return ? Send Rose and Désiré to bed, and when I ring, let Miss Pascal in yourself. May I rely on you ?"

"If you think such a proceeding wise, either for you or for her."

"My dear friend, if I could ever think any of my proceedings wise !"

He telegraphs by a look to *her* that the latest difficulty is solved ; and gliding, with her noiseless step, from the room, Leah runs upstairs, lightly as though she trod on air, to dress. After putting on her bonnet and shawl, she steals on tiptoe, with shaded candle, to take a farewell glance at Deb. The child is sleeping softly ; not a reproach can conscience urge upon this score. And she will be back so soon ; and she does so crave for air and movement, so passionately craves for one more hour—the last, it may be, in this mortal life—spent with Danton !

He awaits her at the bottom of the stairs, and after scanning her attire, item by item, sends her back promptly to the third étage, for a thicker veil and plainer bonnet. Her shawl, being black, will pass, and her dress. . . . Unversed in millinery, Danton considers her dress black also, forgetful of the shining yellow mouches, the fatal yellow mouches, that, to the eye of an adept, would be visible in the darkest street, the thickest crowd in Paris.

"Now you are disguised to perfection," he whispers, when she comes back to him a second time. "You might stand before a

court-martial of old ladies ; you might meet Mr. Pettingall himself without fear of recognition."

"If I thought there was a chance of meeting him—of meeting any one—I would turn back yet," says Leah, waxing cowardly.

But she is under the guidance of a will stronger than her own. She hesitates, draws away ; a minute later finds herself quietly walking along the Paris streets on Danton's arm.

CHAPTER X.

UNDER THE LIMES.

WHAT a night it is ! All above the city's heart the sky shows, dusky purple, above the flicker of the gas ; but westward, in the direction of Passy, a big full moon has newly illumined the horizon, and trees and roofs at every instant stand out more delicately clear against the passionate amber of her light.

Leah and Danton traverse the Rue de Rivoli, then make their way into the garden of the Tuileries, and in five minutes' time are comparatively alone. All is still among these leafy allées—so still that you might hear a bird stir among the branches, or an insect hum. The measured footsteps of an outlying sergent-de-ville, the whispers of an occasional pair of happy lovers, seem to heighten rather than interrupt the profound silence of the place and hour.

They walk on slowly, arm-in-arm, not talking. Now that the final plunge is taken, the irrevocable moment come, that must transform "the game begun between them for a jest" into sharpest earnest, Danton's spirit is heavy, his heart disquieted within him. That he loves this girl, whom he has known for

half a week, he can no longer doubt ; loves her with the unreasonable passion born of sense—it may be, during the past few hours, with the dawning of a higher, more enduring feeling. Love, an expenditure (not an income) of a hundred and fifty pounds a year, and obloquy ! Such is the prospect he, Eugene Danton, has to offer Colonel Pascal's daughter, in exchange for the hundred thousand pounds of Jack Chamberlayne. How abject must be his folly, should he make such an offer ! How bitter, how sealed the ultimate doom of both, should she listen to him !

And Leah, while her hand trembles on his arm, while every silent moment spent together is intoxication, Leah is shivering in her very soul with terror over her own rashness. She gauges pretty accurately the depth of Danton's feelings for her, is prepared—when, in such matters, is a woman not prepared ?—for his being “ imprudent ” enough to declare himself, has generously resolved to soften the pangs of rejection by as large an infusion of pity as her sense of duty permits. But I must have portrayed Leah Pascal very weakly, if you think that one serious intention of braving the world's opinion, or of holding the world well lost for love, has ever presented itself to her imagination. She has been trained to consider marriage as a profession, the only lucratively honourable one open to her sex, and no more dreams of giving up Jack Chamberlayne, than a man, because he chance to have taken a love fancy, would dream of giving up his calling as a barrister or merchant. Love . . . and marriage ! To realize how absolutely these two ideas have, up to the present time, been divorced from each other in Miss Pascal's mind, you must be tolerably well versed yourself in the Gospel according to St. Mammon—the gospel by whose light alone the Prince Charming's children have been reared.

Leah's soul—I repeat it—shivers affrighted over the rashness

of her own escapade, and in her terror her fingers involuntarily close tighter upon Danton's arm. He whispers all the reassurances as to her safety that such an appeal demands, and presently, to render the chances of any hazardous rencontre still fewer, turns with her into a narrow side walk leading towards the Place de la Concorde—a walk so shadowed by over-arching limes and chestnuts, that Leah, for the first time since she left Madame Bonchrétien's house, takes courage and lifts her veil.

"If Lord Stair himself should meet us here, he would find it a hard matter to recognise me," she remarks, with an uneasy little laugh.

"Always Lord Stair! I should have thought there was some one more nearly interested in your comings and goings than Lord Stair?"

"You mean Mr. Chamberlayne? Well, you see, it is *so* easy to set poor Jack's mind at rest. Lord Stair is the kind of man to know of a folly—I am afraid I am committing one at this moment, M. Danton—the kind of man who would know of a folly without letting you suspect his knowledge for a dozen years, and then bring it all out, fresh and green, to destroy you with at the last. Jack flies into the most fearful rages for about five minutes, and forgets everything!"

"I like that kind of character," says Danton. "You at least know, with a man like Chamberlayne, what ground you stand upon. His is a thoroughly true nature, Miss Pascal."

"Ye-s," assents Leah, taken aback. Is it to listen to Jack Chamberlayne's praises that she is walking alone by starlight with M. Danton? "And still I should hardly have thought that you and he would be the kind of people to get on well together."

"'Getting on' is a strong expression, Miss Pascal. Out of a

thousand, five thousand people, how many does one get on with ? Chamberlayne strikes me as a frank, upright little fellow, a man I should be exceedingly ashamed to deceive—'twould be so easy—simply that."

"My beau ideal is a state of things in which it should be unnecessary to deceive any one !" cries Leah. "The exact reverse of the world in which fate has set me. You look upon me—ah ! I know you must—as artificial and false. Well, I don't think I should have been so if my mother had lived. I never—believe me when I say this—never told her one falsehood."

How could any man keep his head cool with a woman as lovely as Leah, pleading eagerly, humbly for his good opinion ? Danton feels strength, wisdom, self-command, all deserting him fast, and Leah goes on, under her breath, and with emotion, that for once comes from her heart. "You think Naomi handsome, do you not ? You should have seen *her*. Why, the children in the street would turn to look at her as she went along, she was so beautiful—and sweet and loving ! Perhaps that has turned me bitter, made me old while I am still so young, the thought of my mother, and of all the love she wasted on that—on papa, I mean. It was a runaway love-match, M. Danton. Mamma was the daughter of a rich city merchant, and she gave up all—riches, family, religion—to become my father's wife."

"And their happiness lasted ?"

"Did it ever exist ? When I was a child I used to look into my mother's eyes and wonder if they ever could have worn any other look than that sad, hopeless one I knew ! Papa—how shall I speak of it—papa when he married thought that her father would relent, for certain. A Jew"—dark though it be, Danton can see the flash in Leah's eyes as she brings out this word—"A Jew tradesman ! How could such a person keep up

resentment, long, against the man of birth, the Christian gentleman, who had condescended to marry into his family? And the Jew tradesman died, just about the time I was born, and left us all paupers; did not mention my mother's name, or the name of her well-born husband, in his will."

Concentrated passion is in her voice. Easy to see that her instincts, the ineradicable instincts of race, are on the side of the Jew tradesman, her grandfather, and against Colonel Pascal.

"From that time till she died mamma's life was a martyrdom. Put Naomi, put me," cries Leah with spirit, "into such a position, and we could pull through it. We have mingled blood in our veins, are his children as well as hers, and might—by heaven, we *would*—give back wrong for wrong, hatred for hatred. But mamma was soft as water, strong only in her enormous love for us, I think. She was dying for three years; the doctors said of some heart complaint, in many syllables; of a broken heart, I say. At last, when poor Deb was a baby a few months old, mamma put her into my arms, quite suddenly, one day, and died—in a moment, as they had always told me she would die. Ah, that day, that day! And yet, in the middle of my grief, I made Naomi kneel down, I remember, and I held Debbie, and then, Naomi lisping the words after me, I thanked God, aloud, for having taken our mother out of his reach! He was away—when was papa not away?—and I wrote to him . . . such a letter! If my father loves me little now, he may well be excused, on the score of that letter alone."

She pauses, her breast heaving, every nerve in her frame a-tremble. "And your life after this?" asks Danton presently, but in an altered voice. Something in her story has touched him acutely—touched him in a widely different fashion to aught that Leah's philosophy dreams of!

"Our life after this, M. Danton, can be summed up pretty accurately in one word, 'neglect.' Papa lived in a house in London for some years, and as we could be boarded at home a little more economically than at school, we were kept there. The servants looked after us, or did not look after us, as they chose. Sometimes we went through the pretence of a governess. Sometimes we improved our minds at a cheap day-school. Debbie was always sick, and as papa said there was no money for expensive nurses, we elder ones had to look after her as best we could. But for Deb I would have run away—I swear I would. I used to tell papa so with delightful frankness whenever he reproached me for any of my domestic shortcomings. And all this time you must know, we kept up an 'appearance.' Papa had relations and friends in London, and these people came to smart dinners occasionally, and we children had to put on smart dresses, and tell our little falsehoods, and act our little filial tableaux with papa. . . . Well, well—why should you be interested in such a history? Years went on, the London house got too dear for us, I suppose—I have never attempted to understand papa's money matters. At all events we left it, and began to drift about from lodging to lodging, from boarding-house to boarding-house, as you see us now. We have had many near chances of becoming rich, M. Danton, but, somehow, all have fallen through our fingers. Once, papa was engaged to a nabob's widow, and the bank containing her thirty thousand pounds broke, the week before the intended wedding. And once, at Cheltenham, the marriage breakfast was all but ordered for an elderly young lady, with a Manchester papa, who went wrong about settlements at the last. As for me—if you knew the number of excellent matches I have just not made!"

"A poor look-out for Mr. Chamberlayne," remarks Danton, somewhat dryly.

"Oh, I am not speaking of the present occasion, of course. There is no one sufficiently interested in the matter to forbid the banns this time."

"You believe that? Suppose"—his voice falters—how terribly in earnest he is! thinks Leah—"Suppose some one deeply interested in the matter were to forbid the banns at this moment."

"It is very unkind of you to joke, M. Danton."

"I was never farther from joking in my life, Miss Pascal."

"Well, then, what do you mean? I declare I have not the very faintest idea. Please tell me."

Not for one instant does she lose her self-possession, although she loves. A declaration, all the debatable ground that borders on a declaration, is such familiar territory to Leah Pascal.

"I mean that *I* forbid them," says Danton—his peremptory, most unloverlike tone startles her—"and for reasons, odd as it may seem to you, unconnected with banks, settlements, or money in any shape. Thinking not of these, but of the somewhat graver issues of Life and Death, *I* forbid the banns!"

CHAPTER XI

"SPARE HIM!"

LEAH remains chilled and silent, and, after a minute, Danton goes on.

"If I could feel like the stranger I really am to you, Miss Pascal, I should doubtless have made my bow, and offered my

congratulations with the rest. These things crowd so thickly round a professional man's path that life might be spent in vain interference were he to speak his mind about every ill-omened marriage he is forced to witness. But I am interested, too deeply, perhaps, in your welfare, and I cannot see the sacrifice without, at least, raising my voice in warning. It were better for you and Chamberlayne both to die, than to make the promises you purpose making to each other next Wednesday."

"I—am exceedingly obliged to you, M. Danton," says Leah, stiffly. She had nerved herself to listen to an outburst of passion, however wild, but was by no means prepared for a physician's lecture. "Mr. Chamberlayne and myself should be greatly flattered by your 'professional' solicitude."

"Chamberlayne would be the first person to see the sense of my opinions," returns Danton. "In the course of the few words we exchanged the other night, Chamberlayne said enough to convince me that he judges accurately of his own state. Plain language, in a matter like this, is best. I will speak plainly. His is a disease from which there are few recoveries, Miss Pascal."

"I am sure I don't know about that. In these days it seems that everything can be cured. Papa has had the best advice in Paris, and Dr. Ducie himself says that with care and quiet——"

"Dr. Ducie! for a hundred-franc fee what will not Ducie say? Care and quiet may prolong the poor fellow's life. They will never patch him up into even decent health again. Ducie knows it as well as I do."

"I would not forsake the man I loved," says Leah—yes, positively, she can bring her lips to use that word "loved" with steadiness. "I would not forsake the man I loved, because of

his infirmities. When I first promised to marry Mr. Chamberlayne, he was in no robuster health than he is now."

"Then I have nothing further to urge. A sacrifice made in such a spirit is, of course, heroic. One moment longer, if you will have patience to listen, and I shall have done. You are not overstrong, yourself."

And again Danton's voice falters, betrays him; again Leah prepares to temper justice with mercy.

"Not overstrong? Why I have never had a day's sickness in my life, and yet I have nursed Deb through measles, chicken-pox—every disease under the sun—without help from any one. Your science is at fault, M. Danton. I mean to live until I am a hundred years old."

"Properly taken care of, there is not the slightest reason why you should not do so."

"And what do you call being properly taken care of?"

"Shall I tell you?" Involuntarily his arm presses the fingers that rest there. "In the first place, then, your life ought to be spent without excitement."

"Excitement is my life. You might just as well tell me to go without food——"

"Without excitement, absolutely. Without late hours, crowded rooms, stimulants, opiates, cosmetics, or any of the other thousand poisons that a career of fashion entails."

"Good Heaven! we are getting tragic! And instead of these?"

"Instead of these, for the next two years, at least, a monotonous, soporific kind of existence in some very different climate to London or Paris. Your days spent out of doors, your evenings alone with . . . well, you would not be sent into exile, I suppose, without one companion. Not a single dinner-party, not a

ball or theatre ; none of the haste, and whirl, and fever of town life, which, with a temperament like yours, can have but one most tragic ending !"

He pauses, and Leah is silent. As near a declaration as any man can go without actually declaring himself Danton has gone ; and yet—yet he does not stand committed. And they are fast emerging towards the Place de la Concorde ; in another two minutes they will be under the gaslights, amongst the crowd again, and his fate will rest in his own hands still. "Spare him !" whispers the better part of Leah Pascal's nature. "He loves you, as these Quixotic sort of men do love, and you would not part with a tithe of your coming riches for his sake. Spare him the present humiliation, the lasting shame of rejection." But the whisper is all too weak to combat the promptings of vanity. Every woman who is a practised coquette is apt to be more coquette than woman in moments of temptation.

"You offer an alluring picture, I must confess, M. Danton. The *dolce far niente* for two years, and a slave—I think you said I might be allowed a slave?—to carry out all my little whims and humours. Oddly enough"—she adds this in a graver tone—"your advice, almost word for word, was given to papa about me once, by our old doctor in London, the same doctor who had attended mamma. Deb was ill, and quite by accident he felt my pulse one day. It is the queerest, shakiest morsel of a pulse in the world. Judge for yourself."

And she stops, and taking her hand from Danton's arm, holds out her wrist to him. Just here, it chanced there is an opening among the interlaced lime-branches overhead, and the pale starlit heaven shines full on Leah's face, radiant with a look of tenderness, such as, I think, it never wore till this instant—a

look perhaps, of that dead mother whose beauty, rather than whose soul, she has inherited.

"Quick, faint, irregular. I know beforehand all the trite physician's jargon. Tell me something quite new, this time, M. Danton."

The slender wrist on which his fingers press is warm: the lips, with their pleading sweetness, are close to his. Many a stronger man than Danton has fallen before seduction less potent. He answers—not in trite physician's jargon—not, certainly, by the telling of anything new. . . . And Leah bows, for the first time during her twenty years of life, the captive, not the captor.

CHAPTER XII.

AT THE CAFÉ CHANTANT.

AN hour passes, and they are slowly sauntering along the Champs Elysées still—Elysian fields, in truth, for one pair of foolish hearts on this voluptuous autumn night? They go back day by day, almost minute by minute, over every stage of their brief acquaintance. They retrace the looks, the words, by which their love has progressed; argue hotly as to which began to like the other first, have a serious quarrel as to which will like the other longest. They speak of the future vaguely, brightly, as people speak who know that life is to be gone through, hand in hand. And all this time no mention of Jack Chamberlayne, of Colonel Pascal, of October the eighteenth, Leah's marriage day. For one brief hour they are lovers, as unconditionally as though no prior claim bound either of them, as much cut off from sordid care or presentiment as were the first pair of lovers in the Garden. One hour: then comes the moment of awakening.

"I have written my prescription," Danton whispers, "and you must follow it, dearest." Dearest! And sixty minutes ago it was Mister Danton, Miss Pascal. A week ago, and each had not heard the other's name. "Two years, at least, spent tranquilly in the south——"

"With my slave to wait upon me?"

"With your slave to wait upon you. Afterwards, a life of quiet obscurity in some place where your slave may minister a little to the good of others as well as to his own happiness! These are the physician's orders. Shall you, or shall I, be the first to make them known to your father?"

"To—to papa?" she stammers; "I don't think I quite understand you. Make known our secret——"

"To your father, and also, of course, to Mr. Chamberlayne. I will do as you wish to the letter, will bear the whole burden of guilt undivided—this evening, if you choose! And yet, Leah, would it not be better to put me altogether out of sight at present, and rest your conduct upon the soundest basis of all—your own want of love for the man you are engaged to marry?"

But not a syllable can Leah force herself to utter in reply. Danton, who is accustomed to be tolerably in earnest in most things, takes it for granted that, with all levity, the girl is either false or faithful; has definitely foresworn, or definitely transferred, her allegiance. Leah, who knows herself to be only playing—horribly serious though the comedy has grown—shrinks uneasily from the question which must put her sincerity to the test. She has been surprised into loving, much as an actress may be surprised into shedding genuine tears; and while she is half ashamed of her own folly, cannot face the inevitable shock of désillusionment without a pang.

"It would be different," she falters, at last—"Don't be angry with me for my weakness—it would kill me to have to bear your anger! Put yourself for an instant in my place, and tell me *how* I can act otherwise. It would be different if things had not gone so dreadfully far about poor Jack."

"I don't know what you mean by 'dreadfully far.'"

"Oh, well, everyone belonging to us in the world has been written to, and all our relations have sent me presents, and Jack's people, too. I have some hundred pounds' worth of presents, papa says—and there is the trousseau bought . . . papa has run I don't know how much in debt to pay for it. . . . And even the breakfast ordered!" adds Leah, gaining firmness with every corroborative detail as to the adamant nature of her fate.

Danton, on this, turns round, and, loosing the hand which a moment before was pressed so closely on his arm, looks long and steadily into his companion's face.

"If it is beyond your strength to give up Chamberlayne, may I ask why you are here in the Champs Elysées with me?" he cries sternly. "For once let me hear the truth—give me an honest answer. I have misunderstood you long enough."

The tone, the question, are almost brutal. And Leah loves him better than she has ever loved him yet!

"I am here because I am utterly—despicably weak!" she exclaims. "And still I don't know that *you* should be cruel enough to blame me! Papa's poverty is not my fault. I cannot help being forced to marry for money any more than I can help caring—caring too much——"

And then, a tremble of the perfect lip—tears! and Danton relents: at the end of another minute is asking forgiveness for his "cruelty." A girl with indifferently-shaped features and a

sallow skin might have said precisely what Leah said, and produced no effect upon a lover of average sense, save that of repulsion. But when Beauty utters plaintive little mercenary sentiments, with tears in her eyes and plaintive lips, who can withstand her? Not Danton; though few men have had sharper experience on the score of mercenary beauty, and the kind of shaping it is apt to give to the lives of others.

They settle everything by a compromise; in fewer words, they settle nothing. They love (on this cardinal point there is thrown no shadow of a doubt), and Leah swears to be faithful to her love—if she can: perhaps the wisest oath a woman of her strength can make. Only let her have to-morrow for reflection. Let Danton go away to his friends at Fontainebleau, and give her time to think, commune with her own heart, cast about her for what chances of salvation may yet be open. Above all, let them keep silence respecting to-night! With the cup of Paradise at her very lips, Leah would still be a woman of the world, tremblingly alive to the risk, not so much of what she does, as of what she does being discovered. Let no one in Madame Bonchrétien's house have a suspicion of her imprudence until the moment arrives when the truth may be heard of all men. And meanwhile——

"Meanwhile," says Danton, taking her hand and drawing it again within his arm, "for one more hour, one more half-hour—I hear the clocks striking the hour already—you are Leah, my own, to me! Not Miss Pascal, not Mrs. Chamberlayne. Well, half-an-hour's happiness is an enormous gain in a man's life. I am thankful for it. Don't let us speak of to-morrow again, love. There is no to-morrow for me."

His voice is changed, but tender as ever; and Leah, with a sense of relief, sighs forth some pretty platitudes about his

goodness, his generosity, then nestles closer to his side. It would require a revelation from heaven to tell her *what* feelings have been resolutely put to death in Danton's breast at this moment!

Exceedingly few women and men understand each other when they are in their sober senses. How must it fare when they are under the blinding influence of love? Danton is unworldly to a fault; Leah worldly almost to a virtue. With hand clasped in hand—ay, with heart beating against heart—a gulf, deep as the nethermost hell, must ever yawn between these two. And still, for a brief space longer, they are one! Though intellects be severed wide as pole from pole; though spirits differ in quality as gold from clay; love, youth, and a silent autumn night can produce sympathies that *seem* so faultless—while they last.

They walk on slowly, miserly of every instant spent together, until they reach the Rond Point. Then, all at once, Miss Pascal discovers that she is tired, and nothing will refresh her so much as listening to the music at a monster café chantant, about a hundred and fifty yards further on!

The music is vulgar, Danton objects; the crowd more than corresponds to the music. No matter; Leah will have her way. Even in a moment which may be termed the supreme experience of human life, in the bewilderment of dawning passion, this restless, contradictory nature is dissatisfied, craves for some other emotion beside the actual one. It is not enough to feel; Leah Pascal must see, be seen; must have an audience, though the first chance acquaintance who recognises her may bring shipwreck to every dearest ambition of her heart. And to the café chantant they go.

The old, old scene awaits them. A woman in white satin

and bare shoulders, singing such songs as the Parisians affect, with brazen voice and gestures ; citizens accompanied by wife and daughters ; citizens accompanied by other than wife and daughters, listening. Punch, bitter beer, gas, tobacco-smoke. A good many gay women's dresses, a good many women's faces the reverse of gay. Who wants a description of a café chantant in October ?

Well, Leah Pascal enjoys it. The songs are—such songs as the Parisians affect ; she does not understand a word of them. The music is atrocious ; she does not know one note from another. A tinkling Champs Elysées orchestra, or a ballad artistically sung, are accompaniments, simply, to whatever scene of her own life Leah Pascal may be enacting. And as to the crowd—inasmuch as a crowd has eyes and can admire—even this one is more congenial to Leah's taste than solitude. Her graceful figure shows, notwithstanding the heavy shawl that muffles it ; the thickest veil can only partially conceal her well-poised head and throat. Not a man who passes but gives her one of the looks which to Leah are essential as the air she breathes, quickly followed by a glance, such as men do bestow upon the companion of a beautiful woman, at Danton.

In every recollection of lost joy it is said there is always *one* special remembrance that predominates—an hour, a moment, that surpassed all others in intensity, and which memory unconsciously chooses as the ineffaceable type and model of the rest. Little as she knows it, Leah, during the next three minutes, is probably standing at such a pinnacle—is tasting happiness for which regret may vainly sicken in the time to come. Vanity flattered ; the craving for excitement, which to her is a physical need, gratified ; and love, strong as heaven has given her to feel, warming her heart.

During the next three minutes. Then, turning her face away from the orchestra and singing people, she sees straight before her—and freezes as she sees—Lord Stair!

He stands alone, under the gaslights, scarcely a dozen yards ahead, conspicuous by reason of his tall stature, his high-bred British air, among the crowd of small Parisians. His face is impassive as Fate itself. Not a glance in the direction of Leah and Danton betrays that he has recognised them. He is studying the little pink concert-bill he holds in his hand, and seems quietly attentive to the roulades of the lady in shoulders and satin on the stage. But Leah knows, feels, that she is on the brink of deadliest peril, and a faintness seizes her for very terror.

"Keep yourself calm," Danton whispers. "If you accept my love, will not the whole world, Lord Stair included, know it? How can it matter that you have been seen with me in any place, at any hour?"

"Take me away, or I shall faint," she gasps. "You don't know how easily I faint. Take me home—anywhere away from him? Oh, Monsieur Danton, veiled, disguised like this, I must be safe! Tell me, on your honour, that you think me safe!"

Danton leads her back as quickly as he can through the crowd. But the crowd has become denser, and before they can get free of it Lord Stair passes them so close that his showing no recognition, even of Danton, is suspicious. The lights are at their utmost brilliancy in this particular spot. They shine full on Leah's shrouded trembling figure; they cause the golden mouches to stand out in traitorous distinctness upon her fatally chosen skirts. And it is a boast of Lord Stair's, that he never overlooks, never forgets, one detail of a woman's dress. Leah

feels as though her salvation must hang upon his want of memory now.

Clinging tight to Danton's arm, she finds herself at length in darkness and fresh air again, and, half turning, sees Lord Stair moving in an opposite direction, his face coolly impassive as before, the little pink programme in his hand. With any other man she might feel herself safe. Any other man would have recognised or not recognised her. Not so Lord Stair. To get the weak into his power, and *keep them there*, is one of Lord Stair's pet foibles. Five, ten years hence, Leah Pascal feels that she may meet him, not knowing if he suspects her; worse still, not knowing to what kind of use his suspicions may be turned.

All the bloom is off their love-talk. The trembling fingers, the agitated voice, bear unmistakable witness as to the earnestness of Leah's terrors; and by that very earnestness Danton can measure, only too well, the probable duration of her faith to himself.

"If you accept my love, will the whole world not know it? How can it matter in what place, at what hour, you have been seen with me?"

He repeats his former consolation, with more of the same nature; and Leah answers, almost petulantly. Everything is undecided; the truth will have to be broken gradually, decorously. Whatever the circumstances, whatever her real innocence, society would never pardon a woman for such an imprudence as she has committed——

"Society! Ah, to be sure; you care for the opinions of society," cries Danton, hastily. "Forgive me, Leah; I am a fool! At every moment I—I misjudge you, child! Now the thing is to get you out of this 'imprudence' without loss of

time—throw Lord Stair, and everyone else, as much off the scent as may be."

He walks on with her at a rapid pace down the Champs Elysées and across the Place de la Concorde, then turns into the Rue de Luxembourg, and after a minute or so, bids Leah wait under the shadow of a porte cochère while he hails a fiacre. They are now at the corner of the Rue du Mont Thabor, not two hundred yards distant from Madame Bonchrétien's house.

"And I can be of no further use, Miss Pascal," says Danton, as he hands her into the carriage. "I am a quick walker, and will keep you in sight till you are safe home; but you are better without me than with me! Tell the driver to ring loudly, and do you yourself walk straight up into the drawing-room among them all. If you are questioned, you have been spending the evening with a friend—a dozen excuses will, I am sure, occur readily to you, in case"—even by the uncertain lamplight she can see the quiver of his lip—"in case, after all, you find it convenient to disown your walk in the Champs Elysées. Good-night!"

"Oh, Monsieur Danton! are we to part like this?"

She will make no money sacrifice for him. She is shivering with fear lest the paltry two hours' happiness she has accorded him should be discovered. And yet to lose one iota of his regard is agony. If it were possible to have money, with all that money brings, and love, such as this man could give, safely hidden away, so that it should never shame her, yet lending meaning, colour, warmth, to the chill glitter of her lot! If one could unite heaven and earth, God and mammon, honest love and a dishonest, sordid marriage! Alas! what lives are wasted, what hearts broken, over this endeavour—this "plastering

together of the True and False, with vain intent to manufacture therefrom the Plausible !”

“ I shall see you to-morrow, early, Monsieur Danton. Don’t make me pass an utterly miserable night by parting from me so coldly.”

“ Coldly !”

The driver, with folded arms, with stolidly unseeing face, sits on his box ; the passers-by are few. Danton and Leah are as much alone as though a hundred star-lit leagues lay between them and Paris. He takes both her hands in his, clasps them, and then . . . he hesitates for a moment, and lifts them abruptly to his lips.

“ I shall see you to-morrow evening, Leah ; not a moment earlier. Such a resolution as you have got to make will want four-and-twenty hours’ hard thinking over, at least.”

“ You will find me fixed as I am now,” she exclaims, carried for a second fairly out of herself. “ What would be the loss of friends—of the whole world to me ? How can I ever be false to you after to-night ?”

“ And if you are ‘ false,’ as you call it, I forgive you, my poor little Leah ! Remember I told you so beforehand. In being false to me, you will be true to all the substantial goods of this life.”

“ Except the greatest good of all,” murmurs Leah, the tears glistening in her eyes, her features working with emotion. “ If I had never known you, substantial goods, as you call them, might have satisfied me—not now.”

So they part. Danton pays the coachman his fare, and directs him where to stop, in the Rue Castiglione ; and in two minutes’ time, Leah, like one awakening from a dream, finds herself ascending the familiar stairs of Madame Bonchrétien’s house.

Now, if she can only contrive to reach the shelter of her own room unseen. Miss Smith, respectful of manner, coldly mistrustful of face, opened the porte cochère to admit her, and has already returned to the salon. If Leah can but make her way, unnoticed, past the Argus eyes that haunt that dreadful first floor, she will be safe. But no such happy chance stands her friend. The salon door is open, and old Major Macnamurdo, busily mixing hot whisky and water at an end table, sees and speaks to her. To shrink from notice, after this, were more hazardous than to confront it, Leah decides, quickly; and with Lord Stair safely out of the house, what danger is there, in fact, for her to dread? She throws back her veil; calls up one of the smiles of command in which, as we know, she is a proficient, and answering Major Macnamurdo's remark with a jest, passes on into the salon.

Lord Stair himself stands before the fire-place.

CHAPTER XIII.

M. DANTON'S WIFE.

LORD STAIR stands calm and imperturbable, just as Leah saw him half-an-hour ago at the Café Chantant, in the Elysées; the only outward difference being that he holds a tumbler of whisky-and-water, instead of the little pink concert programme, in his hand.

From October till May, it is a received usage in the Bon-chrétien establishment that the boarders shall partake of a mixture pleasantly called by Madame *punch Anglais* on Sunday evening. It was Madame herself, I believe, who, in a genial

mood, instituted this conviviality, on account of "ces messieurs" dining earlier to attend the services of their faith; every glass of spirits being charged as an extra in "ces messieurs'" weekly bills. As Leah enters, Mr. Pettingall, the Comtesse, and Mrs. Amiral Tomson are drinking their punch, with gusto, before the fire; with the thermometer at eighty, Désiré builds the after-dinner fire, high as ever: Lord Stair sips, or goes through the form of sipping his. And Leah's soul prophesies evil on the spot. Lord Stair is not poisoning himself on Madame's Sunday whisky—is not keeping up Sunday conversation with Mr. Pettingall—for nothing.

She throws back her veil, loosens her shawl, and, with her heart beating till she can hear its beats, walks in amidst them all, as steadily as she will walk up the church on her father's arm next Wednesday. You will not find one woman in a thousand but possesses this kind of courage, as useful, perhaps in its lowly way, as the fine animal contempt of danger that enables men to face sunk fences and five-barred gates in the pursuit of foxes, or mitrailleuses and Martini rifles in the quest of glory. Lord Stair fixes his eyes—when he is extraordinarily in earnest, Lord Stair's eyes lose all their obliquity—full upon her face, and Leah returns the look, unflinchingly.

"You have been out—to church, of course?" he remarks, pushing up a chair for her, an odd sort of marked gallantry in his manner.

"I have been out, but not to church, Lord Stair," returns Leah, with composure. "Evening church is a work of supererogation quite out of my line."

"It is deeply to be regretted," says old Mr. Pettingall, sanctimoniously—"thank you, Macnamurdo; you may mix me

another half-glass, with rather less water this time—deeply to be regretted that the English residents in Paris avail themselves so little of the appointed observances of their church. I may say that it is a pity the English residents in Paris put aside so many of the other observances which in our own Protestant country are enforced!”

Lord Stair, on the deliverance of this little homily, coughs into his hand and looks moral. Mrs. Amiral Tomson and the Comtesse shake their heads, with meaning, and give each a side glance at Miss Pascal. It is evident, Leah sees, that public opinion—the chameleon public opinion of a boarding-house—is against her. Not a soul amongst them, unless it be Lord Stair, can know anything definite about herself and Danton. But suspicion-germs, like those of other diseases, float in the air, imperceptible to sight or touch, yet fulfilling their deadly office only too surely. Désiré knows that M. Danton visited the chamber of *la petite*, Mademoiselle being present; Rose, the chambermaid, knows that the rooms of the young ladies were vacant during the afternoon, and that music and voices were heard from the salon of M. Danton; Miss Smith, silent as the tomb, but still a woman, knows that Leah Pascal and M. Danton left the house in each other's company at ten o'clock, and that Leah Pascal returned alone at midnight.

With such materials in existence, how should suspicion not be rife? And how should suspicion, once engendered, be other than rancorous? The legitimate lover a millionaire, the unlawful one a pauper! Could infidelity blacker to orthodox eyes be conceived of than this upon whose brink Leah Pascal stands?

Mr. Pettingall delivers his homily; Lord Stair coughs into his hand and looks moral; the glances of the old ladies are in

themselves a whole concordance. Leah's courage waxes faint. And twenty minutes ago she was ready to brave the world, wished there were more worlds than one to brave, for Danton's sake!

The entrance of Colonel Pascal causes a momentary diversion of interest. The Prince Charming returns in excellent spirits from his club, where, indeed, every one, save his future son-in-law, has smiled upon him. With a daughter on the eve of realizing a hundred thousand pounds, 'tis surprising how genial even club acquaintance will become, men who a month before never could recollect one's name for twenty-four hours at a stretch! Just in time for a glass of Madame's punch. Well, this is better luck than he deserved. Seeing no light in the entrance hall, he half feared to find the salon deserted. "How are you, my dear Mrs. Tomson? Macnamurdo, your rheumatism better, I hope? What, Leah, in the drawing-room still? Then my poor little pet upstairs is better than Chamberlayne's accounts lead me to fear. I need scarcely make the inquiry."

"Little Deborah has passed a quiet evening, I thank you, Colonel," remarks Miss Smith, in her chill monotone. "I have been sitting since tea-time at Deborah's side. The child has scarcely stirred."

Miss Smith—one enemy more than she counted on!

Leah's cold fingers clasp each other tighter. Oh, if Danton were but here! With him, she almost feels that it would be a relief to stand up boldly, and, facing them all, tell the truth. Without him—well, if falsehood be necessary, she feels that she can tell *that*, too; better without him, probably, than in his presence.

"And—and you, Leah?" says Colonel Pascal, turning to his

daughter. "Ah, I see, you have been spending the evening out At Rosina Sherrington's, of course?"

Rosina Sherrington is Leah's one young lady friend in Paris, her prospective chief bridesmaid. They meet daily for conferences on wreaths, veils, flounces, and favours; they kiss when they part and meet, love, detest, confide in, and betray each other by turns. As the future course of Leah's life will run widely apart from Miss Sherrington's, I may be brief in speaking of her.

"You have spent the evening with Rosina?" repeats Colonel Pascal, a little tartly. Has not Jack, between every change from gin-and-potash to brandy-and-soda, been growling fiercely about Leah's "cursed caprice" of the afternoon? "And yet, when Chamberlayne called, I understand, Deb was too sick for you to see him!"

Leah makes no answer. She is not indisposed towards falsehood, on a large and saving scale: to tell paltry untruths that to-morrow may expose is not the sort of weakness to which she is prone. She makes no answer; her father eyes her more sharply; all the suspicious old faces round the fire eye her more sharply. Quietly and naturally, Lord Stair steps in to the rescue.

"Chamberlayne has to learn the grand lesson life teaches all of us—that a woman's will is never to be questioned. A lover! Why, my dear fellow"—he is addressing himself to Colonel Pascal—"a pretty woman may have a lover any day. But a friend, a dear, detested female friend to discuss next Wednesday's toilettes with! What chance has Chamberlayne, has any man, against a rival like that?"

The good humour returns to Colonel Pascal's face; it is the first time in this mortal life he has been called "my dear

fellow" by a Viscount, and Leah breathes once more. She is saved; and, in spite of herself, her eyes give a quick look of gratitude at Lord Stair. Friend or enemy, Lord Stair, it is evident, means to play his game like a gentleman, will keep her counsel and his own, at least until war be openly declared between them.

But though the danger as regards Leah be tided over, public feeling is still at white heat against Danton. I have before said that this out-at-elbows medical student is no favourite with what may be called the titled people of the house. Mrs. Admiral Tomson, Madame la Comtesse de Miramion, Churchwarden Pettingall (erewhile fraudulent banker's clerk), all dislike him with the bitter dislike such small souls know towards everything in human nature that is beyond *their* comprehension. A man who has abandoned the Church of England, and a family living in the Church of England, who attends sick theatre people for nothing, who smokes cigarettes in the salon, sings French love songs on Sunday, wears threadbare coats, and gives his money away like a prince. . . . What should these good old Pharisees feel but horror against a reprobate so utterly outside the pale of their salvation!

"I remarked that M. Danton dined at home to-day," says the Comtesse, dexterously choosing a quiet moment for the insertion of her pin-point. "It is not often we are favoured with M. Danton's society on a Sunday."

"I wish we had more of his society at all times," says Lord Stair. "I am sure there are very excellent qualities in M. Danton, if one could only get to know him better."

Never was the damnation of faint praise more effectual. Everybody gives a shake of the head and looks dubious; even Miss Smith coughs mournfully. Old Major Macnamurdo,

meekest, least malicious of mankind, observes that he has long held one opinion on the subject, which is, that M. Danton is his own enemy. Major Macnamurdo would not mind telling the young man the same thing to his face—his own worst enemy.

"Whenever other excuses are wanting for the palliation of error, we are accustomed to hear the same sophistry advanced." Thus speaks Mr. Pettingall, in his biggest didactics. "Unfortunately, sir, when a man is his own enemy, he is the enemy, nine times out of ten, of society at large, and of those laws—ahem!—those fundamental moral laws by which society is held together, and the welfare of its members generally secured."

There is a little pause, as when a preacher comes to "Thirdly" in his sermon. Then, "I have never," Lord Stair remarks—"pardon me if I seem to differ from you, Mr. Pettingall—but I have never really heard of any authentic instance in which M. Danton has transgressed the Decalogue. I respect the absent too much," adds Lord Stair, "to defend them. Still, I am an enemy to vague accusations. With what particular sin is M. Danton charged?"

"It might be more appropriate to ask, with what is M. Danton not charged?" Mr. Pettingall here lowers his voice, in deference, it may be assumed, to Leah's youth and innocence. "Why, you, yourself, my lord, must have seen the class of persons with whom he unblushingly appears in public." Oh, Mr. Pettingall! With what class of persons does my lord appear, in public and otherwise, unblushingly always? "I regret to have to say these things in our good Miss Smith's presence, but both she and our worthy Madame are aware of my views on this point. M. Danton is not a person whose moral character will bear investigation."

The tone of Mr. Pettingall's voice, the whole expression of his face, betray the scandal-monger possessed of a secret; the scandal-monger possessed of a secret that his soul burns to divulge!

"I have never analysed the cause of my feelings," remarks Colonel Pascal, pulling down one long whisker until he can inspect its quality out of the corners of his eyes, "but from the first moment Monsieur—um—ah—Danton and I met, we—well, we did not love each other. A case simply of Mr. Fell, I suppose. Elective antipathy, don't they call it?"

"And yet he really is gifted," simpers the little old Comtesse. "I declare that *ut de poitrine* makes me forget all my prejudices—and I am very prejudiced. A man who outrages the *bien-séances* as M. Danton does, is a source of constant trial to one's nerves."

"A pity he don't display his talents on the stage, the proper place for them," remarks Mrs. Amiral Tomson, in her grand bassoon. "I heard him *bravouraring* as I put on my bonnet this afternoon, and I could not help thinking, on a Sunday especially, the performance was rather theatrical for a house like this—a house that advertises a Protestant partner in 'Bradshaw!' What do you say, Miss Pascal?"

"I say," cries Leah raising her eyes with a sudden glitter in their yellow depths, "that I abhor the practice of stabbing in the dark, and despise the assassins who practise it! Accuse M. Danton of any sin, any crime you like, all of you; but do it openly, when he is present. Give him a chance of self-defence."

"You speak warmly, young lady," says old Mr. Pettingall; but he does not look at her. He stands, his back to the fire-place, his face upturned to Madame's grand gilt-and-plaster chandelier. "It is, however, possible to understand—it is

really quite possible to understand how a person like this M. Danton may exercise an influence over young and imaginative minds. The more reason, perhaps"—this as in half-soliloquy—"why it becomes a duty to let him be known, henceforth, under his true colours."

Miss Smith, who up to the present moment has remained silent and downcast, now jumps up from her chair. "I should be glad if you will say nothing further against M. Danton, sir. His private life, we know, has been unfortunate, but through no crime of his. M. Danton is the friend of all who ever need help. You, who have lived here so long, Mr. Pettingall, must know that as well as I do. His purse, his time, are at the call of every distressed English person in Paris, of every beggar in the street. But for us—for Madame Bonchrétien and me—he would leave himself without a sou in the world, without a coat to wear. M. Danton is the most noble, the most generous——"

Miss Smith stops short, with a moistened forehead, with quivering lips. After all, the right kind of woman's heart beats in *cette pauvre Smeet's* breast! Translate her friend, and you will see of what materials she is made. Bonchrétien never speaks ill of any client; but then she never offends one. Miss Smith would quarrel with the whole connection of the house sooner than listen quietly to a word in dispraise of Danton.

"It is not to be supposed that M. Danton is devoid of every good quality." But it is evident from Mr. Pettingall's tone that he makes this admission under protest. "That he enjoys the esteem of Madame, and yourself, says much—for your own excellent hearts, at least. And I am quite ready to admit that he possesses the showy habit of indiscriminate almsgiving, wrongly termed charity. Unhappily, my dear Madam, we know—all experience teaches us—that habits of this kind may

exist in the same individual, side by side with the very gravest social laxity. Every one present is not aware probably, ahem —ah !——”

How he enjoys his task ; how lovingly, lingeringly, the words cling to his lips.

“ All the members of our little circle are not aware, probably, of the lamentable circumstances of M. Danton's private life ?”

“ I think most of us know to what you allude, sir,” says Miss Smith. “ To Madame Bonchrétien and myself, M. Danton has never made a secret of his misfortunes.”

“ But from society at large he keeps them hidden dark enough !” cries Mrs. Tomson. “ However, we will have no more of these wolves in sheep's clothing. Mr. Pettingall, by my advice, is going to make the truth known publicly. You received a letter, Mr. Pettingall, some few weeks ago ?”

“ From the hand of an unknown female in London.” Mr. Pettingall drops his voice to the proper regulation pitch of malice, and general attention grows profound. Even Lord Stair (who knows the whole story beforehand), even Colonel Pascal condescend to become interested.

“ A letter from an unknown female, addressed to the clergyman or churchwardens of our Protestant church, and calling on them in the interests of humanity to ascertain if a person named Eugene Danton was still living, or could be traced, in Paris. Mysterious, inscrutable are the ways of Providence,” adds old Tartuffe, with stereotyped uplifting of the eyebrows. “ Not only was the person sought to be traced — Eugene Danton and myself resided, as you all know, under the same roof !”

“ And the letter was from one of M. Danton's old loves, of course ?” suggests Lord Stair, cheerfully. “ The Nemesis of

some fatal grande passion. Ah, Miss Pascal, when you are ten years older, you will know more about that subject than you do now."

Leah is sitting rigid and silent; her face pale, but absolutely, unnaturally composed; not a movement of her hands, not a quiver of lip or eyelid betraying her.

At Lord Stair's remark she looks up with a smile. "When I am ten years older, I shall probably think, as I do now, Lord Stair, that grandes passions and everything belonging to them are a mistake. That kind of Nemesis, at all events, is not likely to trouble me."

"The writer of the letter," proceeds Mr. Pettingall, "was a woman who had the most sacred of all claims upon M. Danton, and who, it seems, evinced sufficient sense of duty to desire a reconciliation with him. Had it not been so I should have stirred no further in the matter. As regards the truth of what she stated—you, Miss Smith, and Madame Bonchrétien, were present when I placed the communication in M. Danton's hands. You are aware that he did not attempt to deny the validity of the writer's claim upon him?"

"M. Danton denied nothing," exclaims poor little Smith. "He started for London that same night, as you must well remember, sir."

"And, we may presume, found the person of whom he was in search? M. Danton has volunteered no confidence to me since his return, and I really do not feel sufficiently intimate with him to solicit it."

"Yes, he found her." And now Miss Smith keeps her eyes steadily fixed on Leah Pascal. She would go through fire and water to gratify the smallest whim of Danton's, but does not flinch from striking a death-blow at Danton's love. "On the

first evening of his return, M. Danton told me thus much, and gave me leave, if there were need, to repeat it. He found the person who desired reconciliation with him in London. And she was well."

"And the person was——?" Lord Stair asks the question, yet he turns away from Leah as he does so. He is cruel, but with a man's, not a woman's cruelty, and shrinks from looking upon the girl's blanched face. "You may as well let us have the story in its integrity, Mr. Pettingall. The mysterious lady who sought reconciliation with M. Danton was——?"

"M. Danton's *wife*, my lord."

CHAPTER XIV.

BALM IN GILEAD.

PERFECT love casteth out fear. Leah Pascal's "fancy," a caprice born of idleness, nurtured by vanity, shivers under the first breath of adversity it is called upon to meet. A woman of larger intelligence would have given Danton the chance, at least, of explanation; in the face of harshest evidence, have believed him free until his own lips confirmed the story of his marriage. A woman of larger soul had said, "Married, or not married, I love him, and must love him still; *that* can no weakness, no unworthiness of his undo!" But you will generally find that human beings are pitiless in nice proportion to their breadth of moral vision. Her own pride brought low, her own vanity sharply stabbed, resentment against the man who has caused her to suffer—these, not love's all-embracing, all-extenuating anguish, are the first emotions roused in Leah Pascal's

breast. With a face of marble, but collected of demeanour as though the whole scene were some amusing drawing-room charade, she listens to Danton's calumniators for yet another ten minutes. Then, with just her usual voice and manner, wishes "good-night" all round, salutes the tip of Prince Charming's whisker, bestows a coquettish parting glance upon Lord Stair, and makes her way lightly up to her room—shared with her by little Deb in Naomi's absence.

The child sleeps profoundly; crushed, humiliated, burning with angry passion though she be, Leah is faithful to the one unselfish instinct of her nature; walks straight to her sister's pillow, stoops, and kisses her. Debbie sleeps profoundly, the smile of innocence on her lips; the smell of the Gloire de Dijon roses on the toilet-table makes the room sweet. That smile, that sweetness, fall like madness on Leah's over-wrought brain, for both speak to her of Danton! Double-locking her door, she flings herself, dressed as she is, upon her bed, and through all the early hours of the night keeps her watch—that ghastly first watch over a new-slain hope—alone.

Withhold your pity because her love is not of the finest? Oh, reader, pity her the more. Noble sorrows bring their own consolation. The sufferings of inferior, narrower natures, should appeal to one like the blind physical pain of an animal—a pain over which no modifying influence of soul or will has power.

The other inmates of the house go to their rooms; Leah hears them not. Danton, after a while, returns, pausing, lover-like, outside her door as he passes. She hears him not. She is in the state of nerves when our bodily perceptions become blunted, when all outward objects of sense are but as shadows, when a torturing grief within. At last the short night of

Paris ouvrier life is spent ; the rumbling wheels of the market carts, the cries of the country people, begin to be heard in the streets below, and with a shiver Leah starts abruptly from the bed. She is cold—ice-cold, and sick. Bodily discomfort arouses her from her trance of bitter passion ; she undresses, gets into bed beside warm, little, softly-breathing Debbie, and falls into the deep sleep of exhaustion ; dreams fair dreams even, poor child, of moonlight walks with Danton, in which diamonds glitter on her wrists and bosom (Jack Chamberlayne's diamonds), and the Gloire de Dijon roses are in her hand. Happy for Leah Pascal if she die ere the spirit of that dream be realised !

It is late in the morning before she stirs ; and when at last her heavy eyes unclose, for a few mocking seconds her dreams are with her still—"not imagined, felt." Then comes the dreadful flash of full returning consciousness, and then—the necessity, familiar to most of us, of living and making no sign that the heart within one's breast is dead. Joys may be exceptional ; grief never is unique. No commonplace day that dawns but is the conflux to a million human beings of two eternities of pain. Throughout this city of Paris, do you suppose hundreds of women are not going through just such an awakening as Leah Pascal's ? Each thinking her own fate the hardest, each crying out in her soul against the Juggernaut society, the letter of whose laws, while she tramples the spirit under foot, she is too weak or too cowardly to set at naught.

The necessity of living ! Leah rises, dresses with as much fond care as usual, and comes down pale, but "in spirits," to her mid-day breakfast, and to the accustomed flirtation that seasons it. Lord Stair is more her slave than ever throughout the meal ; by a thousand delicate and unobtrusive attentions

shows his care for her, insists upon her drinking champagne instead of the vin compris of the table, makes her laugh even—she finds it easier to laugh than smile—over the latest bit of Paris gossip. And Leah feels grateful to him. All men are worthless; at that generalisation she arrived long ago; the thought of love is noxious to her as is that of food to a fevered palate. Still, for such services as vanity demands, as well utilise Lord Stair's devotion as another's.

When Jack comes round in his smart mail phaeton at two o'clock, he finds Miss Pascal ready dressed—the first time since their engagement such punctuality has rewarded him—and looking handsomer than her wont.

"I never saw you wear a veil before, Leah," says Mr. Chamberlayne, staring at his beloved with amative lack-lustre gaze; "and it becomes you wonderfully, by Jove! Why, you have quite a colour! I've always told you what you wanted was colour."

So—a veil and a little rouge can patch up the ravages of such a night of passion as the last!

Leah takes her place beside her lover, drives along with him to the Bois—ay, past that Allée in the Champs Elysées where she walked with Danton fifteen hours before—and feels that as long as she can command fine-stepping horses, and irreproachable dress, and see the eyes of men and women follow her as she passes, there may be balm in Gilead yet. When she returns to the Rue Castiglione, a couple of hours later, a glow that is not wholly due to art is on her cheeks. Her hand lingers in Jack's at parting. She confesses, by not denying, that she looks forward to a winter spent under Italian skies, with feelings of happiness that almost equal his. Jack drives away intoxicated—for one time at least in his life—not by absinthe.

Half way up the stairs appear Deb and Naomi, flying at headlong speed down to meet their sister.

"Cousin Bell has come, Leah! Cousin Bell has come! All the house smells like M. Rimmel's shop, and she has thirteen packages, and wants to have tea before dinner, and her hair is puffed up on her head like the ladies at the play." So shrieks Debbie.

"Cousin Bell has brought me the loveliest chatelaine," cries Naomi—a flutter of genuine agitation in her voice—"and she says I ought to wear my dresses real grown-up length now. And I am to go and stay with her in London, and be introduced. And, oh, Leah"—this in a whisper—"isn't Cousin Bell's face made up? Why, the powder *stands* on her nose!"

Leah, at the news, lifts her veil, and hastily rubs her handkerchief over her cheeks (does Leah love Cousin Bell so well as to weep over her arrival? thinks Deb), then puts a smile on her lips—we have seen before that she is clever at this essentially feminine accomplishment—and runs up, preceded by the two wildly-excited children, to the drawing-room.

"Bell! A day earlier than we expected! Such a delightful surprise—how thoughtful, how good of you!"

"My dearest girl!"—they embrace—"I was *so* anxious to be here at the last to help you"—they embrace again—"and I knew I should look a wreck for the wedding, unless I had two clear days after the horrid sea-sickness. You own sweet pet!"

They embrace for the third time; then fall to scrutinising each other's faces, as pretty women do, who are at once closest friends and direst rivals.

"The poor thing has not thriven on her engagement," remarks Bell. "Engaged people never do thrive. I lost seven

pounds and a half before I married Mr. Baltimore. The incessant trouble of the dressmakers, I suppose."

"Or the misplaced anxiety of one's friends," answers Leah. "But tell me about yourself, Bell, dear. You are not looking a quarter as well as you did in Scarborough. What will you have—tea? In this barbarous house they never give us five o'clock tea; but I will order some for you at once."

Then, each having relieved her anxiety as to the other's health, the two dear friends settle down on a sofa beside the fire and grow confidential; so confidential that Deb and Naomi, listening with the avid attention of unfledged girls, find it difficult at all times to decipher the meaning of their talk. The better, perhaps, for such rudimentary morals as Naomi and little Deb may possess.

"Laura Griffiths is looking saffron-coloured." Mrs. Baltimore has been spending the past month in Brighton; her stories of well-known London people are consequently as full-bodied as though it were June, not October. "Saffron, indeed, is hardly the word—that dead, thick gamboge, rather, that dark women do turn when they go wrong in their affections. And Sir George passes her without bowing. This I can vouch for. He was riding with me on the cliff the other day, when we met her. The old dowager has taken lately to prune de Monsieur liveries, and you should have seen how Sir George enjoyed it when I commented, as a matter of taste, on the mixture of purple and yellow! Always the fate of what are called superior women," adds Bell, malignantly. "Poor Laura ought to have lived in the age of Sir Charles Grandison. No man, now-a-days, will dance a sentimental minuet for longer than a fortnight at a time."

"Especially if the sentimental minuet necessitates a gamboge

complexion! Have you been seeing as much as ever of little Arty Cresswell?"

"Arty Cresswell? why, have I not told you about the great Burton catastrophe? You know at what pace things were proceeding at Scarborough! Well, Arty, it seems, confided in some one else (that mysterious some one else, who never actually comes to the light), or left his keys about, or—tiring of the whole affair—sent the letters himself. Every version has had its day and supporters. At all events, the letters—*her* letters, you understand—arrived one fine morning, labelled and dated, and directed in a neat packet to Mr. Burton."

"Who knew everything, as well as the rest of the world, from the first," suggests Leah, with airy cynicism, worthy of Cousin Bell herself.

"Yes; and who, knowing everything, was naturally furious at having his eyes forced open against his will! You can imagine the set of tableaux that followed. Repentant wife on her knees, hair dishevelled, Spartan husband. Her mother sent for. His mother sent for. Children sent for. Clergy. Lawyers. Curtain."

"And now?"

"Arty Cresswell has gone for his health to the Pacific. The children have gone for their education to Germany. Mrs. Burton is living on five-and-twenty shillings a-week at Dieppe, and poor, injured, innocent Mr. Burton is deer-stalking in the Highlands."

"All these things end so samely," says Leah. "A pity some one does not strike out something new in the way of domestic catastrophes. It must have been much better fun in the good old days of hair-triggers and twelve paces."

"When men fought with each other, women, at least, had a

better chance," says Bell, savagely. "Depend upon it, gentlemen would contrive to keep their eyes wider open if they knew that their blindness might have to be paid for by an ounce or so of cold lead eventually!"

Mrs. Baltimore lives on men's praise, in men's society; has men friends by the hundred; has embittered men's homes, if she has not broken their hearts, by the score; and hates them! Not, perhaps, as she hates her own sex; *that* feeling is instinctive, warm, human; but rather with the wary, cold hatred of political antagonists. A type of woman belonging to an altogether advanced stage of civilisation, but growing every day we live more common.

"Mrs. Burton is not blameless, of course; indeed with a child of Arty's age, the whole thing must have been her doing from the first. Yet, of the two—the husband and wife I mean—she is infinitely the least contemptible. That is my opinion. The world, with its usual fine bow-wow justice (the world with grown-up daughters especially), cuts Mrs. Burton in the street, and invites Mr. Burton to stay in the Highlands."

"Grown-up daughters remind one of Maggie McDormond," says Leah, languidly interested in the Burton tragedy—"Maggie Atkinson, by this time, I suppose."

"Maggie McDormond? Is it possible there can be another big scandal I have not written about? Maggie McDormond, my dear, has . . . gone to the mischief."

Naomi and Deb both edge further forward on their chairs.

"When you left England, she was on the eve, as you know, of a most ridiculously good marriage."

"I remember. One of the Patent Mustard people, was it not? Eight thousand a-year, and all the little McDormond's to be taken into the business."

"Well, at the very last, as near her wedding-day as you are, she decamped with the footman."

Even Leah opens her eyes at this. The two children give a little cry of delight.

"The footman . . . stay; the German master . . . something utterly disgraceful, I know. Ah, I recollect! It *was* the German music-master; a sentimental young person, with white hair falling on his shoulders, who talked about High Art and Elective Affinities. Little as I like the McDormonds generally," adds Bell, "I must say I felt for the people in their disgrace. Nothing is so impossible to live down as the misconduct of an unmarried daughter."

Leah's cheeks flush to a livelier red than they borrowed from artifice an hour ago. But the light is waning; the curtains across Madame's windows are close drawn; and Cousin Bell, absorbed in her own stories, sees nothing.

"Poor old McDormond ran after his daughter, they say, and just caught her in time to be too late. She had been married the day before. So much for demure little girls who get up at six in the morning to study Mozart, and who decline fast dances on principle."

"She will have her reward, Bell." How coldly, articulately Leah speaks! Who could guess what vain remorse, what passionate memories grasp her heart at this moment? "A woman who makes a love-match needs no worse fate than to be forced to live out a love-match. How is Brighton—as pleasant and as wicked as Scarborough was?"

"Wicked enough in all conscience; I cannot say much about its being pleasant. Every place bores one equally after a week. We have had Tatters and suite to amuse us, for one thing."

Leah's face betrays livelier emotion than even the misfortunes of her dearest friends have had power to elicit from her.

"Tatters! And does she drive the same ponies still? the Cholmondoley ponies, I mean. And how does she dress? And has she taken yet to furs? I would sooner rely on Tatters for real taste than on all these Parisian men-milliners together."

"Tatters, my dear, came out the day before I left Brighton in the very most exquisite costume I ever saw. Ruby velvet, with ermine, so deep, for trimming, and amethyst buttons, that they say belonged to Marie Antoinette. They were purchased for a fabulous price at the Empress Eugénie's sale: authentic historical buttons, not wretched imitations," adds Bell, mournfully, "such as we outsiders are forced to be content with."

Leah's heightened colour, her eyes, her lips, all evince the warmest interest in the subject. "And what was her hat? But I need scarcely ask—*en suite*, of course."

"Her hat," answers Mrs. Baltimore, "was a Louis Seize hunting-hat, of ruby velvet, with a clasp, absolutely princely in value, to match the buttons."

"And purchased also at the Empress Eugénie's sale?"

"No; the clasp was made expressly for her at Hunt and Roskell's; I know the history of every stone; the handle of her driving-whip richly set with amethysts and diamonds to match."

"Such a dress is impossible," says Leah, with a sigh. "One might get as far as the buttons, perhaps."

. . . "And without them the dress is simply a ruby velvet and ermine, such as Mesdames Brown, Jones, and Robinson can order at their milliner's. Impossible to imitate Tatters, without Tatters' resources."

"And who is she, Leah?" cries Naomi, perfectly unable to

restrain her feelings longer. "The very happiest person on earth, I am sure."

"You should never ask questions when your betters are speaking, Naomi. I have told you so often. However, on this occasion, perhaps, your curiosity is laudable. Tatters is—Bell, would you kindly enlighten the children's heathen ignorance?"

"Tatters is one of the best dressed women in London," says Bell, gravely, "as she is certainly one of the most envied. Tatters drives the finest horses that money can buy, she sets the fashion in dress and, it has even been hinted, in manners. Whene'er she takes her walks abroad, half the heads in London turn to look at her."

"As they will after Leah," interrupts Debbie's shrill treble. "When Leah marries she is going to be a fine lady of fashion, like you, Cousin Bell, and Madame Tatters."

Happily the appearance of Désiré, with five o'clock tea, puts an end to the conversation.

CHAPTER XV.


AN ENCHANTRESS À LA MODE.

BELL BALTIMORE is fair, free, and five-and-thirty; tall of stature, upright as a dart, and as nearly graceful as a woman can be who owes full one half of her graces to training, rather than nature. Not fair by temperament—the dark brow and eyelash tell you that—but blonde by long bleaching of the hair, long powdering of the skin—fair, as we of the nineteenth century have grown to accept the word in common parlance. A wonderfully pretty woman, even though her youth (and such a

youth !) be over ; lips sweet as the petals of a wild rose ; a little nose, half-inclined to impertinence, and the handsomest pair of mocking, cold blue eyes that ever smiled away the reason and the fortunes of men.

Poor Bell—what a throat and arms she once had ! Well, when she had them, she displayed them liberally, and now that she has them no longer, she displays them not at all. Chest delicate, say the faculty. Whatever the sacrifice, the lungs must *not* be exposed to night air. Some weaker sisters thus circumstanced might give up health to fashion. Bell does nothing of the kind ; accepts her doom like a martyr, and in a ball-room, with clouds of diaphanous gauze rising to her chin, and softening every angle of shoulder and elbow, looks as girlish of figure still as many a budding beauty of nineteen. Never was woman a greater adept at knowing how much it is good to show than Bell Baltimore. I speak not of elbows only. She carries the supreme art of artless reticence into friendship, flirtation, love—into every relation of human existence.

Married in her teens to a man a score of years her senior, Bell, by the time she was seven-and-twenty, was left alone to steer her little bark among the shoals and quicksands of fast London life. Mr. Baltimore got attached to the embassy in St. Petersburg, and Bell's lungs—so the same accommodating faculty declared—were too delicate to accompany him. Scandal ? Not a bit of it. They lived together as long as fate permitted them, like angels ; was it not through the interest of one of Bell's devoted friends that dear Robert got his appointment ? Mrs. Baltimore, then as now, was immensely admired, run after ; and Mr. Baltimore—well, let us say that Mr. Baltimore had the good taste and feeling to enjoy his wife's popularity. Who can forget Bell's beautiful conduct after his departure ? How she



refused two consecutive balls, gave up Ascot and the Derby. and could only be induced to go to Goodwood with the quietest little party of four, and in half-mourning !

A young woman of seven-and-twenty cannot pine away and die because her husband lives in Russia. Bell, of course, rallied. Every letter from St. Petersburg exhorted her to amuse herself, and she was far too good a wife to neglect the wishes of her absent lord. She rallied ; went out next season more than ever ; perhaps into a society one shade faster than she had frequented with Robert, and from that time to the present has—the word looks malicious, and yet I can find no other to replace it—has floated ! With occasional submergences, I must confess. Are there not submergences in every career, political, literary, artistic ? The career of a votary of fashion is no exception to the rule.

Well, when women in the lower grades of life, wretched seamstresses or mill-girls, once get their heads under water, they very seldom trouble society by coming to the surface more. Bell, wise in her generation, has consistently made to herself friends of the Mammon of unrighteousness, and in high places—friends who, after considerable patience, with a good deal of hard pulling, have each time succeeded in bringing her to dry land. “Mrs. Baltimore was cut at one time by two-thirds of London,” shrieks shrill-toned malice. “Cut, or not cut, I have always gone to court regularly,” says Bell’s calm voice ; “not because the ceremonial amuses me, but because, in Robert’s position, during Robert’s absence, I feel that it is the right thing for me to do.”

How can Mrs. Brown and Lady Smith refuse the acquaintance of a lady who, as a duty, jostles elbows with every duchess and marchioness in the land at the Palace drawing-rooms ?

A good many people do refuse it : old friends of her husband, well-wishers of her children—Bell has actually a pair of small daughters, away under the stern wing of Mr. Baltimore's sisters in Scotland. The world generally accepts her, under protest ! “Not a person I would allow my Lucretia to be seen with in any public place, and we never have her at our small parties. But at a crush—my dear Mrs. Candour, you know as well as I do how impossible it is to weed when you really want your rooms filled.” And Bell understands her position to a nicety ; gives back hatred for hatred, scorn for scorn, with interest ; rewards Lucretia and Lucretia's mamma for each crush to which she is invited, on sufferance, by stabs such as only a woman living in the debateable land between the half world and the whole has power to inflict.

She is a cousin by marriage of the Pascals, and the Prince Charming, with his wonted philosophic optimism concerning success, has always persisted in regarding her as the most innocent of human beings. Once or twice during the periods of submergence of which I spoke, it has indeed been in his power to throw out a stray rope or so on her behalf. And Bell, odd to say, has returned these acts by a certain substantial gratitude—opera tickets for which she had no better use ; boxes of faded finery for the girls ; during the last twelve months, trips to watering-places for Leah ; and, finally, the capture of Jack Chamberlayne.

That Leah, with her beauty, her affection for money, and her perfectly “broad ” notions as to ways and means, might have arrived at the same end, unassisted, is possible—possible, but not likely. Jack, eight short weeks ago, never, on principle, opened his lips to a lady, or in any way frequented the hunting-grounds of decent society. Mothers looked at him in apathetic

despair. Daughters called him "that hideous little monster," and drew their skirts together as he passed. All classes of respectable money-hunters regarded the prospective hundred thousand pounds as already in the hands of the Philistines. But Bell, from that debateable standing-point of hers, thought differently, resolved upon and encompassed Jack's rehabilitation by a coup de main, the ostensible machinery—horse-dealing.

Mr. Chamberlayne at Scarborough for his health, had a thorough-bred Irish mare to sell. Mrs. Baltimore, at Scarborough for *her* health, was suddenly ordered horse-exercise—by the faculty. They met; they looked over the mare's points, in each other's company. "When I have to deal with a gentleman," said Bell, giving Jack the fullest benefit of her blue eyes—"when I have to deal with a gentleman, I never employ either vet. or dealer. You say the mare is sound, Mr. Chamberlayne. Tell me your price in two words, and the affair is settled."

And so it was—for poor Jack. From horse-dealing to tender friendship; from tender friendship for Mrs. Baltimore to tender friendship for her dearest friend, Miss Pascal; the gradations were easy. Not unversed in some other social dangers, Jack had literally no experience whatever to guide him amidst glaciers matrimonial. Jolly little dinners and suppers; boating parties; rides; every human duty, tie, or belief made a theme for ridicule. . . . What was there in all this to scare a man's conscience?—what to remind him that he had overstepped the sunny frontiers of Bohemia and was in a country where the word "tomorrow" has a meaning? Jolly little dinners; unlimited champagne, of the best vintage; a scoff at love and lovers, at husbands and wives—and then an awakening one fine morning, with a worse headache than his wont, and a remembrance that his

signet ring reposed, in token of affiance, upon Miss Pascal's third finger! So was Jack Chamberlayne rehabilitated.

"We owe everything to you, Bell," says Colonel Pascal, pressing his cousin's hand as he leads her down Madame Bonchrétien's gas-illuminated, tawdrily-decorated staircase. "My dear child's early marriage to the man of her choice, a young fellow so estimable—estimable in every way—as Mr. Chamberlayne."

"And, if Mr. Chamberlayne will only live another twelvemonth, the possessor of a hundred thousand pounds," interrupts Bell, wickedly. I will do Bell Baltimore justice. She may be—she is—a finished actress, in her own especial line. Hypocrisy, without aim or audience, is an exertion beyond her strength. "Jack is not estimable, and he is not the man of Leah's choice; but he is a very desirable parti, and I managed it. You are right, there. Well, you have done me more than one good turn in days gone by, and I am not fond of being in debt. Just that."

Bell sits, of course, beside Colonel Pascal, at the head of the table, and the dinner passes off brilliantly. Instantly upon the arrival of the fine London lady, with her airs, graces, band-boxes, and impertinence, Madame Bonchrétien sent to the nearest restaurateur for entrées. Désiré is in his newest buttons; the old ladies have put on their best caps, Deb and Naomi their rose-coloured sashes. Even Mrs. Wynch, much as she detests Colonel Pascal and all belonging to him, is in her snuffy ermine and cotton velvet. Bell herself is simply dazzling. Her dress, an azure silk, a little the worse for a couple of seasons' wear, with soft lace ruffles at her wrists and throat, and a heart-breaking little entanglement of blonde and rose-buds perched coquettishly on the summit of her bleached locks. Beautiful,

with Leah's blooming youth, with Naomi's chiselled features, so near, you could scarcely call her. But there is a fascination independent of, and beyond, girlish freshness, or perfection of outline. Bell Baltimore has studied the whole art of allurements from beginning to end, and practises it with the calm, untroubled certainty of an adept. She gives a side glance and looks down at Colonel Pascal. She openly commences a flirtation with her opposite neighbour, Lord Stair. Toothless old Mr. Macnamurdo, Churchwarden Pettingall, do not get through their dinners without an occasional look or word that makes their withered hearts feel young again.

"And this is what Leah Pascal, in time, may hope to arrive at." So rings the death-knell of love, purity, of all fairest might-have-beens, in Leah's soul. Smiles prodigal as those of *Tatters*, and but a shade less venial. A face patched over to perfection; with morality to match. Insincerity so perfect that one bows before it as a work of art, and a heart of steel. The last-finished product of decades of civilisation—a woman of fashion.

"You have become as silent as a school-girl, my dear," whispers Bell, affectionately encircling Leah's waist when the ladies have returned to the drawing-room. "The depressing effect of living among all these mummies, probably. Oh, my poor child, what men! Is Lord Stair—I mean to appropriate Lord Stair—the nearest thing to humanity the house contains?"

"Lord Stair is my very greatest friend, Bell," answers Leah, evasively. Not for thrice Jack Chamberlayne's prospective wealth could she pronounce the name of Danton before Bell Baltimore. "Don't talk of appropriating Lord Stair, unless you want our friendship to be over."

"It would not be the first time that the same person has had

his heart broken by us both," remarks Mrs. Baltimore. "Look at Mr. Chamberlayne."

"That is quite another matter," says Mr. Chamberlayne's beloved. "If Jack were to admire twenty other people as much as he does me I don't think I could be jealous of him. Poor, good old Jack!"

Poor, good old Jack drops in, unexpectedly, before tea is over. During the whole past week Leah has persistently enlarged upon the necessity of his keeping aloof from the Rue Castiglione during the final forty-eight hours before the wedding. It is an established piece of etiquette that the bridegroom should thus absent himself. . . . Every old lady in the house has told her so. . . . And the little sisters insist on having her to themselves at the last, and she is really not free from those horrible dress-makers one moment during the day. The logical result of which persistence being that Jack has again turned wildly suspicious of Lord Stair; jealous beyond cure of judgment, of every moment that Leah and Lord Stair spend together unguarded by his presence.

Much as he loves the girl—oh, poverty of language, that we must so often desecrate that word!—he distrusts her more; thereby, fool though he be, showing sagacity that might shame the reason of some better men. Her unwonted kindness during their drive to-day sent him away from the house, as I have said, intoxicated; before he had turned into the Rue de Rivoli he began to ask himself ugly questions on the score of her possible motives. Mistrust does not require any very high or complicated mental process; and little though Jack has seen of refined society, his experiences since he left off jackets has sufficed to teach him the meaning of Judas kisses. Once aroused, and neither cigars nor brandy could quiet the "monster begot upon

itself, born on itself." Dressmakers, little sisters, etiquette—a nice pretext to put a man off with, etiquette! Jack broods fiercely over his imagined wrongs during his solitary dinner, rushes forth from his hotel the very second the meal is over, and enters Madame Bonchrétien's salon just in time to find Lord Stair murmuring pretty things into Miss Pascal's ear, on the sofa, and Bell Baltimore in a corner, virtuously playing *besique* with little Deb.

"You aim too high, Debbie." Bell sees Jack Chamberlayne without uplifting her eyelashes, and improvises this small aside for his benefit. "That is just the fault Leah makes too. You children risk everything for double *besique* or sequence, and I—you see, Deb, score my little common marriage, twenty, and win. Oh! Mr. Chamberlayne, is it really you? How you startled me!"

Jack never feels himself more thoroughly at home than in Mrs. Baltimore's company—a doubtful compliment, perhaps, to Mrs. Baltimore! She can talk down to his level, while she makes him feel that he talks up to hers. She knows his world, masculine and feminine—she knows himself; save, perhaps, in some few honest corners beyond a Bell Baltimore's lights. Even with Leah frowning on him, it would be hard for Jack to remain long sullen under the influence of this siren's smiles. And Leah does not intend to frown on any man to-night, least of all on Jack. The presence of her own familiar friend fans the girl's latent coquetry—bitterly miserable though she be—to white heat. When Danton comes (her feverish eyes watch the clock for him already) he shall find Lord Stair and Jack Chamberlayne, *both* at her feet. Her cheeks flush to their loveliest hectic—her spirits become wild. Not Bell, with all her Brighton gossip, her practised powers of amusing, can compete with Leah

to-night. Jack grows more desperately in love than ever. He perches himself on a low stool about the third of a yard from her feet, and, jealousy and suspicion forgotten, looks up, with all the rapture of proprietorship, into her exquisite, animated face—Lord Stair still forming a modest third in the back-ground. Colonel Pascal gazes at the picture of innocent happiness with parental pride; and Bell, neglected, begins to yawn behind her pocket-handkerchief.

“Leah,” cries little Deb, at this touching juncture, “may Naomi and I put on our bridesmaids’ dresses—just for a quarter of an hour? Naomi does so want to try our effect, and we will promise not to sit down; and you really *ought* to let Jack see how we look.”

Leah objects—an unaccountable, sudden sharpness in her voice—but Jack interferes.

“Why the dickens, at such a time as this, should the poor children not amuse themselves? Bridesmaids—love their little hearts! Let us see the bridesmaids’ dresses, by all means. Anything to remind us of that thrice-blessed six o’clock ceremony next Wednesday.”

“I hope we shall call it blessed this time next year,” remarks Leah. However, she lets the children depart, Naomi rushing wildly, three steps at a time, Deb’s poor little halting legs following as best they may, upstairs. Ten minutes later they return, transfigured from gawky, ill-dressed girls, into angels, all white-and-rose and spotless gauze, afraid to walk or breathe or sit, after the manner of angels.

“What we want, to show us off, is the bride!” cries Naomi, in a kind of exultation. “Stand up for a minute, Leah, just to try how we shall look.”

Leah is in simple white muslin to-night; some instinct of

feminine friendship guided her, doubtless, in selecting the one dress dear Bell cannot venture to wear. A creamy gloire de Dijon rose, taken from the glass upon her dressing-table, lies amidst the ripples of her nut-brown hair.

"Yes, to be sure, Leah," cries Jack, springing to his feet; "to please me—well, to please the children, then—stand up for a minute. Where is the use of false shame at this time of day?"

"False shame!" repeats Leah, slowly, and gives her lover a look—such a look of frozen indifference as any man but a Jack Chamberlayne must surely interpret right. "Well, I never thought among my many sins that I should be accused of that."

Saying which she rises, Jack taking forcible possession of both her hands, and allows herself to be centrally placed, for the benefit of the company at large, with the angels behind.

"You want a veil—you want a veil to hide your blushes," cries Mr. Chamberlayne. "Ah, here is just the thing!" And seizing a lace antimacassar from the back of a neighbouring chair, he throws it suddenly over her head. "Now, if we had only a parson handy, we would get through the ceremony at once and save papa the expense of the wedding dinner. By the Lord, we would!"

He draws Leah's cold left hand through his arm, adjusts an imaginary flower in his button-hole, smooths down his neck-tie, goes through the pantomime of producing a ring from his waistcoat pocket.

"I, John Frederick, take thee, Leah——"

He has proceeded thus far in the marriage ceremony before Leah can free her hand from his grasp. The children are in ecstasies, the old ladies, on tiptoe, watch with delight the frolics of our dear young Croesus.

"Take thee, Leah, to my wedded wife. To have and to hold——" And then Jack stops abruptly. A footstep sounds on the stair, the drawing-room door opens; another second, and Danton has walked straight in amidst them all.

Leah's head is turned away, but the sudden quickening of her breath, the feeling of actual physical pain that contracts her heart, tell her the truth.



CHAPTER XVI.

"COME!"

MENTALLY Leah Pascal has rehearsed their meeting at least one hundred times during the past twenty-four hours, always tragically. Danton should find her passionately, loudly injured, or cold and tearless as stone; a Lady Macbeth or a Medea. He comes, and she is acting a farce with Jack Chamberlayne, an antimacassar over her head, a room full of indifferent men and women looking on. Is not the yarn of human lives, as a rule, thus mingled—off the stage? Despair, death, in the soul, and externally the travestiments of a burlesque and spectators!

"M. Danton—this *is* fortunate," cries Naomi. She does not love Danton ordinarily; but any man, any audience would be welcome to Naomi Pascal at this blissful crowning point of existence. "Leah is only got up, you know, but Deb and I are real. With white kid gloves, and bouquets, and our bridesmaids' lockets, this is exactly how we shall be on Wednesday."

"How are you, Danton?" cries Jack, holding out a couple of fingers, good-humouredly. "Just in time to play us the

Wedding March, eh? We have been following the new fashion in executions, Monsieur; getting *our* execution over, snug and quiet, and disappointing the public."

Danton is livid; that ashen-grey colour to which dark-complexioned men are apt to turn under the influence of sudden and violent emotion. But the muscles of his mouth, his voice—all that is within the controlling power of will—betray him not.

"You have done wisely, sir." So he remarks, in answer to Jack's small pleasantry. "Wisely and well. On an occasion like Miss Pascal's marriage many men must suffer. By keeping the spectacle private, we may hope at least that their pangs will be lessened."

At the coolness of his tone, the composure with which he enters into Jack's humour, every fibre in Leah's frame thrills with passion. She snatches the covering from her head, flings it from her, and stands with gaze averted from Jack Chamberlayne and the rest, but confronting *him*. Her eyes seem to have become black as night from the dilation of their pupils, her brow is contracted, her lips are white. An expression of compressed, silent rage, such as I think only features of Hebrew origin can wear, deforms the whole youth and beauty of her face.

"You have the knack of—finding us travestied—M. Danton." God, can this be her own voice, she wonders, that speaks so carelessly! "But practical jokes are our forte. Are they not, Jack?"

And then she turns, and without a blush meets all their looks—her lover's, Lord Stair's, Danton's—all!

"By Jove, I don't know what you mean by practical 'jokes,'" cries Jack, putting on a long face. "You are coming, I hope,

Monsieur, to see me turned off on Wednesday? Evening affair—special licence—dinner here, in the Rue Castiglione afterwards. Of course you have offered M. Danton a place at the mournful ceremony, my dear?"

"If I have omitted to do so before, I invite M. Danton now," says Leah, coldly, articulately. "Our friends are to meet at the English chapel in the Avenue Marbeuf, M. Danton, at six precisely."

"There will be four bridesmaids," cries Naomi, with effusion. "Deb and I in white and rose, as you see, and the two Sherringtons in blue——"

"And we have seen the cake," adds Deb. "Oh, such a beauty, M. Danton! As big as a card-table, with the corners off, and Cupid sitting on a heap of gold in the middle."

"There are temptations for you," says Jack, his hollow little face beaming. "If you want another, I have it—be best man. Oh, I am not joking at all, my love." This is in response to a flash he receives from his love's eyes. "I got a telegram from Smithett just before dinner, and he can't come—broken a couple of ribs by a fall down at Newmarket. If M. Danton would not mind standing proxy?"

"Surely, Chamberlayne—ahem—you must have other friends in Paris, friends of older standing—ahem!" Thus Prince Charming, pompously, from the hearth-rug; Prince Charming, horrified at having a Bohemian medical student, who plays the piano, who gets his living no respectable person knows how, at his daughter's marriage.

"I accept the invitation conditionally," says Danton, pointedly addressing himself to Leah. "Before next Wednesday it may happen that I am some hundreds of miles away from Paris. If I am here"—a little pause; Leah's heart accentuates

that pause with its fullest meaning—"I shall not fail to be at the English chapel, in the Avenue Marbeuf, at six."

"But that sort of answer will scarcely do for a best man, will it?" asks Bell in her silvery tones. She rose while Danton spoke, has crossed the room in her gliding, noiseless way, and stands now close beside Miss Pascal's elbow. "Bridesmaids and best men must, surely, make up their minds, whatever the bride and bridegroom do, before the eleventh hour?"

"Whatever the bride and bridegroom do." As she utters these words with emphasis, Mrs. Baltimore's eyes meet those of Danton, and the gauntlet is thrown down between them. To a very large proportion of men Bell is irresistible. Others, while retaining their peace of mind personally, do fullest justice to her capabilities of conquest. To just a few she is repulsive. Danton is amongst these few, and Bell already knows it. At a glance he discerns the white-wash on her soul, as clearly as the rice-powder on her face; sees the finished woman of the world, the licensed seductress of fashion, in every fold of her clinging draperies, every intonation of her trained voice; and ranks her—oh, how infinitely lower than any of those poor ballet-girls and chorus singers, his public appearance with whom has so scandalised the virtuous-minded inmates of Madame Bonchrétien's house!

"As I am positive to be in Paris," remarks Lord Stair, "and as I never change my mind"—he gives a quick look at Leah—"under any circumstances whatever, perhaps I might be considered an available substitute for Mr. Smithett?"

"Charming! charming!" cries Colonel Pascal, the eye of his imagination already on a paragraph in the *Morning Post*, wherein the delightful name of Lord Stair shall figure pre-eminent. "Really, Chamberlayne, I congratulate myself—your friend

must excuse me—but I congratulate myself on Mr.—um—aw—Smithett's broken ribs."

"I don't congratulate myself at all," says Jack, with his frank rudeness, and looking thunder-clouds at Lord Stair. "Smithett is one of my best friends, and a fellow of my own age, and a deuced good-looking fellow, too. Who ever heard of having a best man——"

"Old and ugly enough to be your grandfather," Lord Stair interrupts him with unruffled temper. "It is an anachronism certainly. Still, in a proxy, I think, grey hairs may be over-looked."

"And your hair is not grey, Lord Stair," cries Deb, fixing her terrible eyes on his Lordship's flame-coloured locks. "I heard Leah say the other day that hair like . . . like *that*!" remarks Deb, with delicate ambiguity, "never turned grey. Didn't you, Leah?"

The speech delights Jack back into good-humour.

"I have a great mind to take you with us as travelling bridesmaid, Deb. You would do finely to amuse us on wet days, and that, when we begin to grow tired of each other."

"If you take a bridesmaid, you ought, in common fairness, to take a best man, too," says Lord Stair. "The whole system of wedding-touring wants radical change. Suppose you inaugurate the reformation, Chamberlayne! Make up a pleasant party of five or six people, and never get tired of each other at all. What do you say, Miss Pascal?"

But the question meets with no answer. Miss Pascal has moved abruptly away into the back drawing-room, and stands there, beside the piano; her head turned from every one save M. Danton, who has followed her, her face bent down over a heap of music she is hurriedly examining. Brief must be their

colloquy, if colloquy they hold ; few the words in which explanation is offered, or passion vented. Mrs. Baltimore watches them stealthily. Colonel Pascal (upon whom an instinct of uneasiness has fallen with regard to Danton) shifts from one dandified foot to the other, passes his jewelled fingers through his hair, fidgets half way across the room—in another minute will be at his daughter's side.

"You have suffered, my poor love ; you are suffering at this moment," whispers Danton. "Yes, Miss Pascal," he adds aloud, "the romance you want is here. I brought it down from my room a couple of days ago."

"Suffered ! You have killed me," comes her answer in broken stifling accents. "You have killed me—and you presume to speak like this still !"

"I love you," is Danton's answer. "Throw me over, be true to me, as you will. I love you."

"Love ?—Yes, papa, yes ; M. Danton is going to sing for us—You dare insult me with that word. I know *the truth*, sir ! Mr. Pettingall has told me the whole shameful truth."

By this time Colonel Pascal has reached them. "It will oblige us infinitely, I am sure, if M. Danton will favour us with some of his very charming songs—the last occasion probably, Leah, my love, that you and Mr. Chamberlayne will have the pleasure of hearing them."

"Let me petition, too," cries Bell Baltimore, crossing to the piano. "Music is my passion, M. Danton—Leah, you have not introduced me to M. Danton—Italian songs above all, and I know that you sing Italian well !"

Danton smiles, looks flattered, and in the space of about a minute and a half has glided into the empty verbiage that in the world is called Art-talk with Bell. He is simply giving Leah

time—time for the philtre contained in that word “love” to enter her veins and lend her courage.

“And you *will* sing to us? Ah, how good! and I may choose—these are your songs, M. Danton—I may choose what we shall have, first?”

And Bell does choose, and Danton sings. He possesses a magnificent natural capacity, as we have seen; a voice rich in tone and compass, affluent in youth's full freshness. So far the task is easy. But be sure, without a tolerably strong will, a man cannot be put through a whole repertory of songs, now bravoura, now ballad, now Italian, now English—a man, I say, his heart torn by sudden anguish of disappointment, cannot sing any number of songs, at command, without the exercise of will quite beyond the average. Happily, Danton possesses this will. He shrinks not from a single note—not even from that upper C his enemies know. Ballad and bravoura, French, Italian, English, he goes through it all like an artist, and brings what Bell herself would call her heart into her throat.

“You really must give me the name of that Italian barcarole, M. Danton?” He has quitted the piano at last, and Bell's blue eyes are looking their softest into his. “I have no voice, unfortunately for myself, but I can just make noise enough when I am alone, with the doors well shut, to recall better things. *Sulla poppa del mio*—’ No, my wretched memory will never retain six consecutive Italian words unless you write them down for me.”

Reader, all things come to him who waits and has power to utilise his chances. During the past quarter of an hour, ay, during every bar he has sung, Danton has been revolving one question in his mind—how to communicate with Leah. To speak to her, even in a whisper, is impossible, guarded, trebly

guarded, as she is. To send her a note through one of the servants of the house might be to compromise them both beyond redemption. And he must communicate with her at once, must see her alone to-night, or no more until he meet her as the wife of Jack Chamberlayne.

The opportunity of which he well-nigh despaired comes to him now, through the agency of Bell Baltimore; Bell, who would give her two best diamond rings—the occasion forces me into strong language—sooner than see Leah faithless to her affianced lover. Moving into such a position that he can rest his hand upon the mantelshelf, and at the same time feel sure that no friendly eyes overlook his shoulder, Danton takes a note-book from his pocket, tears out a couple of its leaves, and at Mrs. Baltimore's command begins to write—but not the name of the Italian barcarole.

She crosses over quickly to his side—is Bell set upon poor Danton's conquest, or what, that she should monopolise him so pertinaciously? "I am really ashamed to give you all this trouble, M. Danton, but that is the price people of talent have to pay. You have written me the title of the song? Now would you add the composer's name, and the publisher's? Thank you *so much*." And Bell stretches out her soft pink palm with a look and a smile that exceedingly few men would have strength of mind to resist.

Danton folds the piece of paper on which he has scribbled six or eight words in pencil, and transfers it to his waistcoat pocket. Afterwards, deliberately dotting every "i" and crossing every "t," he writes down upon the second leaf the name of the barcarole for Mrs. Baltimore, presents it to her with a bow, then returns to the piano, amidst bridesmaids and groomsmen and lovers and all, and addresses Leah.

"And here are the words—the last words of the romance you asked me for, Miss Pascal." Clearly and aloud he speaks; Colonel Pascal, Lord Stair, Jack himself, may hear every syllable. "I had forgotten them till this moment."

And quick as thought the folded slip of paper is transferred from Danton's waistcoat pocket into Leah's hand. Bell Baltimore, not unversed in the art of surreptitious note-giving, watches the whole transaction under shelter of her fan, and arrives at her own conclusions.

Well, and the evening comes to a close. The weary farce is acted out, Jack Chamberlayne's adieu spoken, the final adieu before he shall meet his bride at the altar, and Leah, guarded to the last by Bell and by the children, gets to the quiet of her own bed-room and to liberty. Need I tell you with what trembling haste she locks her door, how eagerly her fingers uncloseth upon the paper that may be her warrant of life or death, with what blinded eyes she reads?

"In the Atelier, when the house is quiet to-night. Come!"

So run the "last words of the romance." Oh insolence, in their altered position, that he should dare address her thus, demand an interview as a matter of right! Oh joy, that he is near, and that he loves her still! She flings the paper down amidst the gewgaws and trinkets that strew her dressing-table, she snatches it up to raise it to her lips. She pales with anger, she flushes with soft repentant tenderness. "In the Atelier when the house is quiet to-night. Come!"

The request is an insult, yet she must needs accede to it, were it but to tell him so. To remain away would imply distrust in her own strength, belief in Danton's. She will go, even at the risk of discovery; go, if only to say those five words "I

love you no longer," and so take leave of him, and of everything connected with the mawkish name of love for evermore. And deciding thus, she holds the note forth for instant destruction in the candle; watches it, cold and resolute, until its corners begin to curl above the flame; then snatches away her hand, and with a passion of tears hides the paper in her breast. "Oh, my love—oh, my miserable broken life—oh, that I might die to-night, that he might feel the weight for ever of having killed me!"

She sits, her head clasped between her hands, while tears rain down her cheeks—scalding tears, such as only the first, selfish, inconsolable grief of youth can produce.

A discreet tap at the bed-room door makes her start guiltily. It is Mrs. Baltimore's maid with a request that Miss Pascal, if not too tired, will come down for a little fireside chat with her mistress before bed-time?

Fireside chat with Bell Baltimore—panegyrics on flounces, orange-flower wreaths, and Brussels veils, *to-night!* Well, if only to turn away suspicion, it must be gone through, like the rest of the hypocrisies that the next forty-eight hours holds in store. Leah bathes her eyes in cold water, rubs her pallid cheeks till they glow again, and in five minutes' time is standing at her friend's door, the conventional smiles, the conventional falsehoods ready on her miserable lips. So good of dear Bell to send for her . . . ah, and what a sweet, sweet wrapper—real Mechlin, of course? And the lining of that becoming rose-coloured taffetas! Now they can have one of their good old gossips, just as they used to have in Bell's dressing-room at Scarborough.

The good old gossips, in which the friends were wont to discuss the ultimate fate of Mr. Chamberlayne!

Mrs. Baltimore is in possession of the state, or visitor's apartment of the Bonchrétien establishment. No meagre camp-bedstead, no curtainless windows are here. Silk-lined draperies, warm carpets, ormolu and looking-glasses abound. A wood-fire, piled half way up the chimney, blazes on the hearth. On the dressing-table is ranged a regiment of scent-bottles, trinkets, ivory brushes; all the raw materials of war, without which a veteran coquette would no more travel than would an experienced general without gunpowder. Bell, herself, reclines in an arm-chair beside the fire, her delicate person swathed in embroideries and ribbons, her head denuded of its towering puffs, and with coils of blonde hair simply wound round it for the night. Novelists of the sterner sex talk of the midnight conferences when heroines appear before each other in tears, and their back hair. Experience of actual life informs us that women are as reticent of displaying the one as the other. Leah has wiped away the traces of her tears, as of so many crimes. Bell has still ten pounds'-worth of M. Isidore's best workmanship round her head.

"You dear, extravagant old Bell, how nice you look—just like the heroine in a French novel! And what a room Bonchrétien has produced for you! You should see the den the children and I inhabit; no curtains, no carpet, no fire. But, to be sure, the Prince Charming gets us boarded, all three in a lump, for a hundred francs a-week."

"Poor dear Prince Charming," says Bell; "I declare only to look at his face does one good. He radiates with satisfaction."

"And gratitude to you, Bell, the saviour of the family. Ah, well, I hope poor Jack will feel the same kind of gratitude six months hence."

And with a sigh, too audible to be altogether real, Leah

draws up another easy-chair beside the hearth and sinks therein ; precisely in such a position that the light of the fire falls, with searching brilliancy, upon her face.

Bell Baltimore watches her in silence. "If I were not assured of your happiness, Leah," she remarks, presently, "if I were not certain that your heart is as light as heart can be, I should say that you had been crying."

"And what if I have been crying?" says the girl, promptly. "What if I cry every night of my life, just now? You know me on the surface only, Bell. You don't give me credit for a single human feeling. Do you think it costs me nothing to leave those two dear children, and——"

"And your dear papa. Of course it must cost you infinite suffering to bid the Prince Charming good-bye! I ought to have remembered that when I spoke. What a delightful person your friend M. Danton seems, Leah!"

The blow is struck quickly, with precision; but Leah does not stagger by a hair's-breadth under the shock. "M. Danton has a remarkably fine tenor voice," she observes, with excellently assumed indifference to the subject.

"And quite one of the handsomest faces I have seen. He reminded me, at once, of Guiglini (you are too young to remember poor Guiglini); just the same fine eyes and delicate line of profile."

It is Leah's turn to be silent. Not remembering Guiglini, how can she be expected to enlarge on the beauty of his eyes or profile?

"Much as I should dislike this boarding-house existence," goes on Bell, "there is one decided advantage in it—you are thrown with picturesque people, such as you would never otherwise meet."

"People like Lord Stair, for instance," says Leah. Evidently the conversation interests her not, for she has to repress a yawn, and raises her handkerchief to her lips.

"Well, even Lord Stair is more picturesque in the Rue Castiglione than he would be in London. But I spoke of M. Danton. Out of a house like this, you would never get a chance of being in the same room with a person like M. Danton. And he is charming! Your father mentioned his circumstances to me, poor fellow; but of course that has nothing to do with talent. An artist is an artist. I can assure you, Leah, I quite enjoyed my evening."

The stiletto point finds its way where the straightforward dagger-thrust was powerless. "He who ran might read that you enjoyed yourself, Bell! For my own part, I must say I thought you a little cruel. Considering your long lists of killed and wounded, could you not be satisfied without the slaughter of one poor obscure victim, like M. Danton?"

"You mean that I laid myself out for M. Danton's conquest?" says Bell, with her chill smile. "Well, this is about the first time I have been accused of a weakness à la Maggie McDormond! I can understand most phases of mental depravity," she adds, lightly; "but that particular one—a woman stooping to accept notice from a man beneath herself—is beyond me."

The firelight quivers and dances on the faces of the two cousins, on Bell Baltimore who allured, on Leah Pascal who accepted, Jack Chamberlayne. Bell is upright, alert, watchful the conscious virtues of a Cornelia on her cold blonde face Leah's eyes are fixed upon the blazing embers, her hands lie listlessly on her lap, the expression of lassitude that follows any strong mental excitement is visible upon her whole person.

"'A man beneath herself.' If I were sufficiently wide awake to argue, we would have that question out, Bell. I should like to know how you interpret the word 'beneath.' But I am really mortally tired to-night. When we were in the drawing-room I listened to all your voices as though I were in a dream, hearing rather than understanding."

"You are thoroughly overwrought, Leah," says Bell, with meaning. "And persons in just that kind of state have an unpleasant trick of falling seriously ill! If you are wise you will not stir from your own room to-morrow. One wants all one's nerve to get through a wedding gracefully. And honestly and truly, you are looking frightfully ill, child. You have aged by three years since I saw you last."

Leah not replying to the compliment, Bell has to resume the burthen of making conversation unassisted, and for half-an-hour more carries it on without slackening speed. Dress, scandal, the delightful golden future that lies before Jack Chamberlayne's wife, the certain conquests and successes of next season's campaign, these are Bell's themes; not unwisely chosen! In a certain kind of shallow cleverness, a certain skin-deep knowledge of the weaknesses of human nature, very few women can surpass Bell Baltimore. At last the clock above the fire-place strikes one.

"And all my chances of beauty-sleep are over for to-night," cries Leah, rising with a start. "Bell, if I look as plain as my best friends could wish on Wednesday, I shall have you to thank, remember. These ghostly vigils are a fatal preparation for dead white silks and a daylight complexion."

Bell follows her to the door, and when kisses have been exchanged, holds the girl's feverish hand in her own. "Leah," she whispers, "will you forgive me if I offer you one bit of

commonplace advice? I promise never to ask a question, never to go back to the subject while we live; but all my hardly-gained experience of the world makes it an absolute duty for me to speak."

"Advice—duty? I—I don't know what you mean, Bell," stammers Leah, changing colour painfully, and trying, with poor success, to smile. "The best advice you can give me is, to go to sleep as soon as possible."

"Yes, Leah, go to sleep; and even in your dreams refrain from listening to one more syllable of the *last words of the romance*. Good-night, my dear."

CHAPTER XVII.

IN THE ATELIER.

THE atelier is on the third floor; a slip of a room, all outer wall and skylight, too hot for habitation in summer, too cold in winter, and mysteriously called by Bonchrétien "the Observatory." In the days when Madame's resources did not enable her to rent the entire house, a photographer used to carry on his business in this room, and the smell of collodion clings, even yet, to the walls. The smell of collodion will be likely to cleave to Leah Pascal's remembrance while she lives!

Precisely as midnight strikes, M. Danton quits his chamber: Bonchrétien, muffled up in an old grey camisole, nightcap on head, sees and wishes him good-night, a quarter of an hour later, as he stands, a cigarette between his fingers, at the half-open door of the atelier.

"Bon soir to my dear M. Danton—star-gazing as usual! Ah,

my poor friend, you discover St. Pierre to pay St. Paul! As much wisdom can be had of our pillow as of our brains." And sending him a little kiss from her finger-tips, Madame, without a suspicion, shuffles away; economical even of time, muttering her prayers as she goes to her roost under the leads.

Twelve o'clock. Half-past twelve. One. Danton listens as the city clocks strike the half-hours, smokes cigarette after cigarette, occasionally gives vent to his impatience by noiselessly pacing up and down the narrow floor of the atelier. At last, when considerably more than an hour has gone by, he is rewarded by seeing the glimmer of a light upon the opposite wall; another minute, and a white-clad figure glides rapidly across the open space at the summit of the stairs, and passes into the room occupied by little Deb and Naomi Pascal.

To gain her own apartment, which is at the extreme end of the corridor, Leah will be forced to pass the door of the atelier. Let her purpose to give him an interview or no, she must, of necessity, find herself once more face to face with Danton alone. "The last words of the romance" will be spoken, and in quite plain tones, with no softening down whatsoever of unpalatable truth. Never was man less disposed for euphemistic gallantry of any kind than is Eugene Danton at this moment.

She leaves the children's room, walks slowly, with a face set and white as stone, along the corridor. The door of the atelier is in shadow; the atelier, itself, illumined in part only by the moon shining through the skylight. Leah carries a candle in her hand, so Danton, unseen himself, can watch her clearly. She reaches the door—pauses: then, as if moved by a sudden impulse, pushes it back upon its hinges, and enters. They stand, and for several seconds look at each other without a word. Leah speaks first.

"You asked me to come, and I am here. It must be an intense pleasure for you to hear how much I hate you that you should still throw yourself in my way!"

I have said that her face is white, and set as stone. As she addresses him, a spot of colour mounts on either cheek: the red glow of passion kindles in her deep-set eyes.

"Hate is not the word," she goes on, her voice sinking to a whisper, yet gaining in power as it sinks. "I loathe you! I loathe myself for having put it in your power to make me suffer."

Still Danton stands before her, silent, and tolerably collected; the cigarette, which up to the moment of her entrance he was smoking, between his fingers. At the sight of that cigarette, Leah's wrath waxes fiercer and fiercer. Women judge by such trifles—alas! their lives are made up of such trifles! Any man, lover or not, who had to wait an hour and a half in the cold, would take out his tobacco-pouch as naturally, as mechanically, as he would draw breath. To Leah that cigarette is a crime; an added insult, deadly and premeditated, to all the injuries that Danton has already wrought her.

"Do you know, sir," so she breaks forth next, "in spite of your airy indifference, that I look upon you as the very greatest scoundrel in the world! I am only a girl. My words cannot hurt you! I wish that I were a man to make them plainer."

"Do you know," says Danton, speaking for the first time, "that though you have broken your faith to me shamelessly, tossed me aside like an old glove, I love you better than I ever loved you yet at this moment?"

"Love? The word from your lips is an insult. Why, but for you——" And then she falters, breaks down, half turns as if to go—but remains.

"But for me, you would be a vast deal happier than you are, Leah. That is the truth, is it not? My poor little Leah—it must have been so hard for you to suffer, with no one at hand to give you consolation."

"I have many people to give me consolation, I thank you, M. Danton. If I have suffered, and I have!—I am not ashamed to say how much your treachery has cost me—the wound will not last for life, be quite sure. I am not the sort of woman to break my heart because one more man in the world has proved himself a villain."

"You are not the sort of woman to break your heart for any cause," says Danton. In the days to come it may be that he will think twice of that remark of his. "The human beings, if any such exist, who break their hearts, are those who love. And it is not in you to care two straws for any man. Why, if you had liked me," he goes on, warming, "as many women like for eight days, knowing that at the end of eight days 'twill be past, you would have defended me when I was absent, have given me the chance, at least, of self-defence."

"I—I presume you know that I have heard of your marriage?" she answers; but in a voice that falters more and more. Already the ground seems slipping from beneath her feet; Danton's stronger will, Danton's absolute truth, begin to assert themselves.

"And what if you have? You know, can know nothing about the circumstances of my life, past or present. The promises of love you made last night in the Tuileries gardens were to me, without conditions. An accident that blackened my life a dozen years ago—the mere fact of my marriage—is altogether beside the question of our love for each other."

"The fact of your marriage . . . beside the question!" she

stammers. Odd contradiction! Though the boldness of his speech shakes every prejudice Leah has to its foundation, she feels her pride unwounded. Many a love speech from the lips of her affianced husband has humiliated her more. "If you are going to speak in this *awful, irreligious* manner," putting down her candle on the solitary table the room contains, "I shall feel it my duty to leave you at once."

"You will remain here, Miss Pascal," says Danton, firmly, "until we have had our last say to each other out."

"Our last say," she repeats, looking at him with vaguely wistful entreaty in her eyes.

"Yes, our very last; as regards explanation, at all events. Probably our last of any kind in this world. Well, we shall not be able to finish it in a dozen, or in twice a dozen words—and you are too thinly dressed to be here, my poor love." He comes to Leah's side abruptly, and throws his arms round her. "Why, you are trembling, and your hands," taking one of them as he speaks in his, and holding it close, "are on fire. What have you been doing with yourself since you left the drawing-room?"

"I—oh, M. Danton, how frightfully wrong all this is! I will not stay with you one moment longer—I have been talking to my cousin, Mrs. Baltimore."

"A good counsellor, on my word—Mrs. Baltimore! Will the day ever come, Leah, when I shall see you tortured out of nature, artificial in look and word, plastered, soul and body, an inch thick in paint, a woman of fashion, like Mrs. Baltimore? Or so much lower, as your capacity for better things is greater!"

"You will see me, as you see poor Bell, as you see all women, such as life and as men's selfishness make us," says Leah, with

bitterness, and breaking as she speaks from Danton's arm. "Take my case, as you are so deeply interested in it. Look at my papa;" her tone, her face, supply the place of adjectives. "Look at my future husband! Look at my best friend, my lover, as he called himself yesterday! If at Bell's age I have turned out half as well as she has, it will be a great surprise to myself, M. Danton. That is all I have to say."

Her warmth almost rekindles Danton's hopes. When a woman extenuates herself to the man who loves her, she betrays this much, at least, that she values his respect; just the very next step to valuing himself.

"Do you mind remaining here for a few seconds, without me, Miss Pascal, long enough merely for me to go to my room and back? And for precaution," suiting the action to the word, "I will extinguish the candle. The moon gives us more than enough light to talk by. Now, don't stir an inch till I return."

And with this Leah finds herself alone; bewildered, stunned, conscious, as far as reason can inform her, that Danton is wrong, she right; yet feeling, through some intuition acuter than reason, that he stands on loftier ground than she, that her best chance of happiness, even yet, rests on obeying him! At the end of about a minute and a half he returns, loaded; his warm travelling plaid to be pinned (he pins it himself) round her shoulders, a tiger skin for her feet. On one side of the atelier is a kind of recess or embrasure, wherein, no doubt, stood formerly a broken column, or other piece of photographic property. It is furnished with a low broad ledge, just spacious enough to form a resting-place for one person. And here Leah is placed. I employ the passive voice intentionally: what action of Leah Pascal's but must be passive so long as she is with Danton? Her delicate Jewish features show fair in the

moonlight above the opaque shadows of the plaid; her diamond rings sparkle, in green and ruby fire, that contrasts and yet assimilates curiously with the mottled richness of the tiger skin upon which her fingers rest. Danton takes up his position at her feet. In novels, Leah has read, probably some hundred times or more, of lovers thus placed. In real life the experience is new to her. Imagine a Lord Stair, or a Jack Chamberlayne—imagine any British admirer she has had, and the list is long—planted, Turk-fashion, on a bare parquet, yet not looking ridiculous! To Danton, with his artistic southern face, his entire absence of self-consciousness, the position seems at once natural and full of ease. He leans his head back against the opposite side of the embrasure, and gazes at her.

"You are the prettiest woman I ever saw in my life, Miss Pascal. I don't believe I have paid you many compliments hitherto, so you must excuse this broad one."

"Compliments are not the road to my favour," says Leah, sharply. She is palpitating with sudden pleasure. No assurance of his love could have affected her to half the same extent as this unexpected appeal to vanity. "I have heard too many of them, I can assure you, not to know their worth."

"I was not thinking of your favour," says Danton. "As you sat there, partly in shadow, yet with the light upon your face and hands, I felt your beauty, all at once, as one might feel a wild new chord in music, struck without prelude. I will never recur to the objectionable subject again, if you desire it."

She smiles in spite of herself; that sweet, half-mournful smile that deadened his reason from the first, and Danton in a second has approached nearer, is holding her hands in his.

"Before I begin my explanation, Leah, my history rather—such a history as it is—say that you were in earnest last night?

Tell me that, however the remaining thirty or forty years of our lives may be passed, for a couple of hours or so you cheated yourself into thinking that you loved me?"

"Your question does not deserve an answer, M. Danton. Cheated myself into thinking! If I had not been too sincere, too foolishly, fatally in earnest, should I ever have gone through the hours of horrible torture I did last night? Why, since I was born," Leah's eyes suffuse with self-pity, the most genuine, always, of her emotions, "I never suffered one quarter what I have done since I heard the truth about you."

"And if you had not heard 'the truth,' as you call it, you believe that you would have remained faithful to your word—would have deliberately chosen poverty and myself, instead of Mr. Chamberlayne and riches?"

Leah shifts uneasily from his gaze. This question that Danton has put so plainly was asked her by her own conscience, not once, but a score of times, during the tortured watches of the night. The knowledge of his marriage has stabbed her pride, has crushed, and at the same time brought forth, whatever genuine aroma of love was latent in her fancy for him. Has it really influenced her fate! Did she ever absolutely purpose to break off her engagement to Jack Chamberlayne, put aside the purple and fine linen of affluence, and step forth into the desolate world of poverty, as Danton's wife?

"Considering our position towards each other, would it not be more delicate for you to leave that question unasked, M. Danton?" So, at length, she replies. Were Bell Baltimore acting as prompter, the words could scarcely be better chosen. "In meeting you here to-night I have sufficiently forgotten what I owe to myself—and others. You might have the forbearance to ask no more."

"I have no forbearance at all," exclaims Danton. "I am selfish in this matter, through and through, thinking of myself and of the years that lie before me"—this with an involuntary sadness in his voice—"not of you. Leah, give me your hand, so—and tell me, before you hear a word of my explanation, that for about one hour-and-a-half you believed you loved me?"

"Believed I loved you! Ah, heaven, that you can look back and doubt my sincerity!"

And Danton presses for no other answer.



CHAPTER XVIII.

THE LAST WORDS OF THE ROMANCE.

"A WELL-KNOWN French writer," says Danton, "classifies wedded happiness, neatly, French fashion, under four heads: 'Acquaintance, three weeks; love, three months; war, three years; toleration, thirty years.' My experience fell short of the stage of war by just three days. I married Madeleine Frere on October the fifth, and on January the second, as a kind of new year's gift, perhaps, I don't know whether she bore the season in mind, she gave me back my freedom, a score or two of my own love letters, and a locket containing my photograph. Other jewelry, of a more directly marketable value, she carried with her, by instinct, I verily believe, rather than calculation. Madeleine could no more resist the magnetism of rings and bracelets than can the insects on a summer night withstand a flame. Until the singed wings are powerless to flutter more, the

moth goes back to the candle ; until the frail, sordid heart lay still in death, Madeleine craved, feverishly, ceaselessly, for the baubles which had been her ruin.

"She was tall, my Leah, somewhat above your stature, erect, fair of skin, though dark-eyed, and with the divinest look of soul upon her lips and brow that ever shone from woman's face. Her hair and yours might be silk cut from the same piece, unless, indeed, hers was endowed with one shade more of gold. I am not sure about that. To look back across eleven years would give a shade more gold to most things—and it is eleven years exactly since Madeleine Frere became my wife."

"Eleven years," repeats Leah, slowly. "Why you were a child, a schoolboy, when you married, then?"

"I was an undergraduate at Oxford, a theological student—ah, you may well look surprised!—with a fine fat midland living before me as the final goal of my ambition."

"A fine English living, M. Danton? You?"

"Computed value, eighteen hundred a year, excellent glebe, good society, and two packs of hounds in the neighbourhood. It was the living Madeleine Frere married, not me, as I discovered too late. Well, before coming to Madeleine at all, I ought to tell you in a dozen words what my own youth had been. . . . But are you warm enough, my love? Pull the plaid closer round your throat—there! And now turn, so that I may not lose one hair's breadth of your face. I am greedy of looking at your beauty, Leah—the chances, in spite of my explanation, are so widely against my being the possessor of it on this side of the grave."

Leah's eyes glisten in the moonlight ; her face softens to as lovely a tenderness as it wore last night under the chestnut trees. "If I have condemned you too hastily—you will at least

forgive me, M. Danton? Oh, what a difficult thing it is to know what duty is!"

"Especially when duty and inclination are ready to clasp hands. Leah," he proceeds abruptly, "you will marry Mr. Chamberlayne on Wednesday. The story I am going to tell you will not hinder that, although it may serve, in other ways, as a homily, perhaps. You will marry Mr. Chamberlayne on Wednesday."

She makes no answer; only bows her head, in a graceful little pose of abandonment upon her breast, and sighs. The jewel-clasp at her throat sparkles for one moment like the keen eye of some living creature, then sinks again into obscurity with a sigh.

"And still I am fool enough, as I look at you, to hope—yes, with certainty staring me grim and unrelenting in the face. Don't grudge me my half-hour's folly—'twill be paid for dearly enough some day, depend upon it. Now to my story.

"My father, Leah, died when I was a child of eleven; my mother five years later. At sixteen, here in Paris, I stood absolutely alone in the world, with a couple of hundred francs, and a schoolboy's knowledge of classics and mathematics standing between me and starvation. How was I to live? My mother had supported us both by giving English lessons since my father's death, and out of her poor earnings had contrived to send me as a day scholar to the College of St. Barbe. But of what use was my education? How could a friendless lad of sixteen convert classics and mathematics into bread? I was too fine to be an errand boy, too proud to beg, fitted, as it seemed, for nothing unless it were a plunge from one of the bridges into the Seine, and then the Morgue!

"Carrying out these ideas, on a certain winter's night, as I

sauntered, chill and solitary, along the Quai Voltaire, a girl, about three years older than myself, accosted me ; laying a little not over clean hand upon my shoulder as she spoke. 'You regard the water too much, my child,' she said, kindly. 'I used to do it once myself—pah !' with a shudder ; 'get pretty black notions by that practice, I can tell you. Now just come with me, and I will show you things better worth looking at than this slimy bed.' She was the daughter of one of the property-men at the Variétés, herself a chorus-girl at another smaller theatre, and—well, not a person to whom you or Mrs. Baltimore would care to speak. But she was my salvation."

"And you loved each other," remarks Leah, coldly. "Fine disinterested conduct, from *persons of that sort*, must naturally end in one stereotyped way !"

"Well, yes, we loved each other," answers Danton. "And what is more, we love each other still. It was my poor Annette, now the mother of half-a-dozen children, who sent me my fruit and flowers yesterday. Did I not say 'twas well you should not know through what hands those roses had passed ? Annette and her children are the scandalous characters with whom my friend, Mr. Pettingall, has seen me in the Bois de Boulogne on a Sunday."

"Mr. Pettingall thinks like the rest of the world," cries Leah, whose code of social prejudice is narrow as the Prince Charming's own. "This is really not a narrative to which I can listen with sympathy, M. Danton."

"I am sure that it is not, Miss Pascal. But you see, if I were to tell you a history of silks and satins, and transcendental virtue, the moral might be fine ; but it would not be the history of my life !

"Annette, I repeat, was my salvation. At the age I speak of,

sixteen, I scarcely looked older than other children of twelve. I had lived with my mother from the day of my birth until her death, and some lingering aroma of her companionship seemed to cling to me, long after I was left to buffet alone with want and despair upon the streets of Paris. Annette got me a little place in the theatre where she worked, my salary about enough to find me in dry bread; and helped first by one of those poor artists, then another, I contrived to live, the Seine and the Morgue forgotten, for more than a twelvemonth: not the unhappiest twelvemonth of my life. Then came a change of fortune—abrupt, overwhelming. An uncle upon my mother's side lost his son, a youth at college, destined for holy orders; I mean for the grand family living in the midland counties; and I, the only other representative of the new generation, was remembered. My uncle found me out, here in Paris, snatched me, to use his own expression, as a brand from the burning, and sent me for a couple of years to a public school, 'to make an Englishman of me;' then to a tutor's in the neighbourhood of London, to be prepared for Oxford.

"The tutor was facile, as tutors to lads of tolerable prospects are apt to be. Our hours of work over, and we were free, following the tutor's example, to run up to town and frequent whatever society, taste whatever pleasures suited us best. He had six pupils at the time, and four out of those six went to the mischief, the brand snatched from the burning among them! Unhappily, while the rest only ruined themselves boy fashion, for the time being, the young fool Eugene Danton contrived to hang a millstone round his neck for life. When I entered Oxford I was formally engaged to Madeleine Frere. On the day I was twenty-one she became my wife.

"My uncle was furious, threatened to make me the beggar he

had found me, and to send me back to what he was pleased to call 'my perdition' in Paris. Then Madeleine, in a happy inspiration, having thrown herself at his feet, he softened. What man, young or old, could she not soften when she chose? Nothing was to be said against the girl personally. She was of decent birth and antecedents, beautiful, passionately attached to her husband—to me! As I had chosen to make a fool of myself by marrying at all, it was a subject for wonder, perhaps, considering my character, that I had not chosen worse. And then, Leah, came that 'three months' love,' of which the Frenchman writes."

"The three months' love of which, after all these years, and frail and sordid though your Madeleine was, you can scarcely bring your voice to speak of!" exclaims Leah, bitterly. "Ah, to command infatuation like that, the worse a woman is, the better her chance. And then men speak to us of their ideals!"

"It is a subject we may as well not discuss now," says Danton, a little gravely. "Madeleine was beautiful; and I, a fool. The history, in six words, of a good many love matches before and since. However that may be, the duration of the 'infatuation' was short. Before we had been married a month, the train was already laid that should divide us, needing but the chance spark, that opportunity is never slow of bringing, to fire it.

"I am telling you of facts only, Leah. The night wears on. I will not rob you of the sleep you need so sorely by one word more of detail than is needed. Before Madeleine had been my wife a month, I confided to her a secret, at that time more important to me than all the empires in Europe, and in return received . . . a blank frozen look of contempt, a curl of

the exquisite lip, an answer which, basely commonplace though it was, burnt itself into my recollection for ever.

"Doubts—vacillation? For my secret was no more than this, Leah, that I had become convinced of my own unfitness to be a teacher of spiritual truths to others. And pray what mattered this? Did half the clergymen going believe what they preach from their pulpits? Were lawyers sincere, or doctors? Was any one sincere, for the matter of that? Unless I wished her to think that she had been cruelly duped, that she had married a man devoid alike of brain and principle, my lovely sympathetic Madeleine desired, the flush of sordid passion on her face, that I would never talk such trash as 'incurring beggary for conviction's sake' in her presence. People without fixed opinions might be very admirable in their own conceit; but fixed opinions were the things that *paid*. I had not the right, morally, if it came to such grand talking, to ruin her, whatever I might do as regarded myself.

"In a word, she had married the living in the midland counties, value eighteen hundred a year—not me. Her anger, now that I can view it from a just perspective, was natural. What were abstract questions, nice perplexities, abhorrence of moral dishonesty, to a creature whose world was comprised in silk dresses, trinkets, a visiting list and a carriage! But then, at one-and-twenty, and an enthusiast, my disappointment was pretty much what a man's might be who should find himself tied, soul and body, not to a living woman, but a corpse. Madeleine, with her radiant hair (the shade of yours, my Leah), and her eyes and lips, was a corpse, livid, corrupt, the moment you touched her soul. And it was not in me then, or at any time in my life, to love, as some men can, the outward shell of a woman, leaving heart and intellect alone. I answered

her ; the fire that was in me piercing through words I vainly strove to render temperate. And in that hour, ay, as we stood there, face to face, I believe her determination of leaving me was taken. The temptation had existed already." Even in the pallid moonlight Leah can see how Danton's cheek becomes a shade more pale. "But the prospective midland living had counterbalanced it. On such slender threads is the destiny of human lives balanced ! Perdition staved off by the mere prospective contemplation of a midland living, with glebe worth so much, and good society, and a couple of packs of hounds in the neighbourhood !

"One of the men with whom I had read at the facile tutor's, a Lord——, well, let his name alone, Lord Lucre, we will call him, had long admired Madeleine ; in the days before I ever knew her, as I learned afterwards. This man, two or three years older than myself, was, at heart, a cynic of fifty, a sceptic, believing only in the fact that nature had endowed him with certain capacities for enjoyment, and fortune placed it within his means to gratify them at will. And he understood Madeleine to perfection: by natural affinity, I suppose ; he had not brain sufficient for fine discrimination of character. No fine attentions did he waste on her, none of the sentimental clap-trap by which some cleverer men might seek to win a woman from her allegiance ! He offered her, from the beginning— Bracelets, of solid eighteen-carat gold, possessing a certain fixed market value ; and no other eloquence was needed.

"On the evening when you essayed your diamonds for my benefit," goes on Danton, "you wore a brown silk dress, my Leah, with yellow ribbon in your hair, and a bunch of violets at your breast. Do you think every smallest detail of that scene is not graven on my heart for ever ? Well, as I entered the room,

as you turned, a jewel-case in your hand and looked at me, all I saw was Madeleine. The first gift of value that she got from my lord came anonymously, and in her pleasure over its reception, pure pleasure over the bauble unconnected with the possible sender, she looked as you looked with Mr. Chamberlayne's diamonds in your hand. 'Eugene, to think that any one should be so generous! A bracelet, set with all these rich diamonds, for me.' I was musing of her voice, her face, of a hundred memories your likeness to her had stirred, when Deb, you may remember, told me I looked like Lazarus. From this time forth Madeleine's mysterious presents continued to arrive steadily. At last I discovered, what every one in Oxford knew before me, the donor's name, and insisted, peremptorily, upon the whole of the jewels being returned, and the intimacy broken off.

"Madeleine listened to me quietly. 'What you say is well said, Eugene.' This, or something like this, was her answer. 'I should respect you less if you could endure to see me wearing ornaments that should have come from your hand, not a stranger's. I will return my lord his presents. I will swear never to speak to my lord again, on one condition—that you will not utter another syllable about your "conscientious scruples" in matters of faith while you live. Surely this is a trifling concession for you to make?'"

"Then I say that she had no woman's heart within her breast," cries Leah. "A true woman would sooner die than see the man she loved depart, by half-an-inch, from principle!"

Reader, is this pasteboard or real? A week, four-and-twenty hours ago, would not Leah Pascal, placed in the same position, have spoken in Madeleine's very words? I, who write her history, know not. Love's transformations are rapid. Twenty-four hours of the passion, in its essence, will suffice to change

clay to gold, uplift us out of ourselves to the level of that which we love as though by miracle. And to nearly all of us 'tis given to feel noble, vicariously. Nearly all of us have moral insight sufficient to pierce through the frivolous motives, the sordid casuistry of a weaker sister.

"Madeleine spoke simply and unconsciously as she felt," replies Danton, "One merit, if merit it may be called, she possessed to no common degree—transparency. She was literally too shallow, both of brain and heart, to be anything but transparent! Would I, or would I not—just before she packed up my lord's trinkets—give her this promise, make the 'trifling concession' of enduring an existence which should be one monstrous out-crying living lie from that day forth until I died?"

"It was a moment of agony to me, Leah, such as no actual after disgrace had power to inflict. It is hard for a man to avow that he has been ever minded, Judas-like, to sell his own soul, and still—as Madeleine stood there, in her slender delicate beauty, her soft eyes fixed on me, the flush of excitement on her cheeks, well—for one single, shameful instant, I must confess to you that I hesitated. She held what to a lad of one-and-twenty is more than life, she held my honour between those little trembling white hands. I thought of the world, of the place given to successful charlatanism in its ranks, of the midland living, of my duties, my sermons. And then—then the darkest moment, the worst temptation of my life, passed away from me," exclaims Danton, "and I answered her. There were other ways of advancement besides the pulpit. So I tried, indirectly, to soften my resolution. The education I had received might possibly be turned to account in science better than in theology. My inclination tended towards science. Five years' work in the London hospitals, and as a surgeon——"

" 'Thank you for the prospect,' cried Madeleine, turning from me grandly. And make no mistake about it, Leah ! At that instant she felt grandly ; felt that I was the impostor, she the victim. 'Try all the professions, one after the other, and see the fine fortune, the position you will realise by them. As to my having faith in you ! How am I, how is anyone, to believe in a man who does not believe in himself ?'

" The logic was unanswerable: I made no attempt to dispute it. How shall one argue, on a matter of conscience, with a human creature in whose organisation conscience has no place ? Of what Madeleine could taste, handle, above all wear, she could speak ; oftentimes with a fluent, original little smartness that had charmed me. Of the inner life, its doubts, sorrows, consolations, she knew less than the man born blind knows of colour. You may convey images to the blind by analogy. The smell of violets, the hush of a summer night, will give him some idea, if not ours, of purple-blue. Madeleine possessed literally no faculty that could lift her beyond the teaching of her own five senses. As the wife of a midland rector she might, had fate been kind to her, have lived out her span of days a contented Pharisee, and have merited any amount of tombstone eulogy hereafter. Let virtue be lucrative, and she was the very last woman breathing to be led astray by the roses and raptures of the other side. Brought face to face with poverty, and she made for riches as a starving man makes for food ; instinctively, untroubled by moral misgivings or questioning of any kind.

" We said our last words to each other on a certain dismal January morning. The streets of Oxford, I remember, were dark with sleet and fog. By six o'clock that night I found myself alone !—dishonoured, as the world said and as I then thought—rid, I know now, of the perpetual temptation to dishonour, the

degrading influence of a woman to whom money was the supreme good, and honesty, independence, truth, all, my Leah, that makes this life of ours worth living for, dross."

Danton pauses, and, shrinking under his steady gaze, Leah bows her face. The degrading influence of a woman to whom money was the one supreme good! What is her supreme good? How came those diamonds on her fingers? At what altar will her spirit "stand passive, while the flesh is sold," eight and forty hours hence?

"Madeleine was punished, depend upon it," falteringly at last her lips give the answer that she knows he looks for. "Women are brought up to hate poverty. They don't hold their fate in their hands as men do—but be quite sure they are punished. Not a woman who sells her soul for a price but is tortured for it, even on this side the grave."

"Leah, my poor little love, don't defend the position. I know as well as you know what you feel. Don't pain yourself or me, by putting it into words. Madeleine acted—according to her lights, we will say—and I was left free to work out my scheme of existence by what pattern I chose. Free in a world from whence all the fairest possibilities of human life had been blotted out, as far as I was personally concerned, for ever.

"Well, Leah, the conclusion of my story can soon be told. I worked out my scheme, by my own pattern, and now, at thirty years of age, am—what you see me. My hair fast turning grey, and no particular certainty as to how I shall pay for my dinner the week after next. When my uncle first heard of my intention to abandon orthodoxy and the family living with it, he believed honestly and sincerely that I had lost my senses. Grief over my wife's misconduct must have turned my not over-strong

brain. Men thus circumstanced not unfrequently take to stimulants, conceive disgust towards the objects of their former ambition. So said the 'eminent mental practitioner' whom he consulted as to my case. When at length he discovered that I was neither mad nor drunk, he behaved like a gentleman; so much I must say for him; made me a present of a couple of hundred pounds, hoped if I had a spark of gratitude in me, that I would not disgrace the family openly, and requested, with an earnestness that touched me, that he might never look upon my face again. At the end of another six months he died, and enormously to the surprise of every one, of myself most of all, a further sum of one thousand pounds was left in his will 'to my nephew, Eugene Danton, who, with all his other vices, is not a hypocrite.'

"These twelve hundred pounds are, have been, rather, my fortune, a colossal one coming to me at the time they did, and with my disposition of mind. I went to London, I worked, I spent five years in the hospitals.

"At last, at six-and-twenty years old, I found myself with my face once more set in the direction of affluence. A West-end doctor, a celebrated specialist, wanted a partner, and having known something of me at Bartholomew's, offered to take me into his house; a chance as regards money that does not fall to one young surgeon, without either interest or genius, out of a thousand. Well, and Madeleine's theory proved true. People without fixed opinions may be very admirable in their own conceit, but fixed opinions are the things that pay. I found, as the day approached for me to sign the deed of partnership, that I was no more suited for a May Fair specialist than for a midland rector. An unctuous air of mystery, a solemn Tartuffe-face to show through a brougham window, the whole art of

pressing woman's hand, unbounded charlatanism, in short—these were the qualifications needed of me; the qualifications that end in a house in Eaton Square, and a splendid balance at one's bankers. And I had them not.

"The partnership fell through, as my preparation for the church had done, and a fact exceedingly useful for a man to know impressed itself at the same time upon my mind. I was not destined for riches, not for popularity, not for what is called social success of any kind or degree.

"What was I destined for? In the first place for work; as without it I had neither food nor drink; in the next for work I could believe in, were such to be found. Impossible to disbelieve in the expediency of setting fractured bones or removing shattered limbs, provided the necessary art has been learnt to a man's best. I did not feel that in the London hospitals I had learnt surgery to my best. Two or three years in Paris, given exclusively to one class of labours, might, I thought, enable me to pass the remainder of my days as a bone-setter with decent satisfaction to myself and profit to others. And this is why you see me here. I earn just francs enough to pay Madame Bonchrétien for my food and shelter. My friends are the old ones of the theatre, who stood between me and the Morgue when I was a child. My hopes,—no, I will not speak of these. Since I have known you, my hopes, my projects, all that concerns my future life, are changed."

"And Madeleine? You—you have heard of your wife recently, they say, and she is well."

"Ay, well indeed—her sorrows and her sins alike ended. Mr. Pettingall told you, doubtless, how a letter of inquiry written by her fell, through singular accident, into his possession? In spite of all that was past and gone, Leah, that letter

smote my heart. If Madeleine had had friends, money, health, *anything* in the shape of prosperity remaining, I knew she would not have remembered me. All bitterness against her, all resentment of the wrong she had wrought me, had died years before; and holding none of the world's opinions as to what might or might not be dignified conduct for a man in my position, I obeyed her wishes at once, and went to London.

"I found her alone, penniless, in the last grasp of disease; a homily upon earthly vanity such as I, for certain, could never have preached, had I attained to the pulpit of the coveted mid-land living. On the day she left me, that January morning, in Oxford, she was in the meridian of youth and health, flushed with the pride of life and with her own beauty. I found her faded, unsightly—as even the fairest woman can become from the reflection of the soul within—unrepentant to an extent that, if I had been less personally interested, would have made her case curious, as a mere study of mental perversity. Her life, she considered, had been unlucky. First, through my obstinacy in throwing up the church—by the hour together, with her sharp illogical logic, she would trace all her misfortunes back to this. Secondly, through the character of the man for whose protection she had abandoned me. Plenty of women had behaved worse than herself, from a moral point of view; but they had not had to do with a Lord Lucre! And then see how badly she had worn—a blonde, too. Other women of her colour kept their complexion and their hair till fifty. Had I succeeded? No. Unnecessary to ask the question. Had I money? Of course not. Fixed principles, as she told me once before, were the only means to riches. At least, had I enough to put her into a comfortable lodging, and give her food, wine, and a few decent clothes (she was too weak to stand up, but wanted silk

dresses, trinkets, hairdresser's work to the last); lend her a helping hand—so with death's grasp upon her she would talk—until she was strong enough to go back to her own world, and shift for herself?

"I had enough to help her," proceeds Danton, after a moment's pause. "I got her a pretty lodging overlooking one of the parks, and was able even to satisfy her as regards ribbons and ornaments. She suffered little in body, nothing at all in spirit, and died like a child without ever taking to her bed. I saw her late one evening, together with an old hospital friend whom I had got to attend her professionally, and she was looking forward in excellent spirits to visiting the Vienna Exhibition. Half-a-dozen new dresses—of course I could give her these before I returned to Paris? and she would undertake to be the prettiest and most noticed woman in Vienna. . . . At eleven next morning, my friend called round at her lodgings as usual, and found her dead."

"Dead!" repeats Leah, in a broken voice. "Oh, if I had known this—if you had told me the whole truth, yourself, what agony I should have been spared!"

"You knew that I loved you," says Danton. "That truth told, and all minor details were unimportant."

"My having listened to words of love from a married man unimportant?"

"If you had loved me, you would have had faith in me," he exclaims. "Married or not married, bound or free—but why waste breath upon things that are over for ever? Leah, this telling of my history has brought us back precisely to where we stood last night, when the stars shone, do you remember, through the chestnuts in the Champs Elysées! You are engaged to marry Chamberlayne, Chamberlayne's riches rather,

on Wednesday, and I, poor and obscure, say to you—Marry me! Break your promise, while to break it is honour, and in the year of grace eighteen hundred and seventy—, let the number of women who sell their love in the market be lessened by one.”

The energy of despair is in Danton's voice, but no faintest ray of hope kindles at his heart. He knows, better than does Leah herself, how fixed is the fate of both. Could he take her by the hand at this moment, while passion softens her, and an invisible priest seal their union by miracle, they might be wed. Jack Chamberlayne's money, actual and prospective, the magic might of all next Wednesday's millinery—these will Leah no more withstand than could Madeleine, a dozen years ago, withstand Lord Lucre's bracelets.

“You would be the most miserable man on earth if I married you, M. Danton. We—we care for each other, but how long does love last without means? I have seen that romance played out to the cruel end, remember, and ever since I was eight years old I have prayed, night and morning, to be delivered from poverty. Forget me. Find some one with a stouter, better nature than mine. I am no more worthy of you than was she whose history you have told me. I—oh, may God help me! *How* shall I pass all the long, long years before I die?”

And with that she breaks down, in utter abandonment, and Danton takes her in his arms. Gold and love. Alas, the old wild lament—that one may not have both! Alas! that this first, only man who has ever stirred that cold heart of hers with passion, should be a pauper, a dreaming enthusiast to whom even competency is impossible!

“Leah, give yourself, give me, another chance. Don't talk

about unworthiness—any woman is worthy of any man, for the matter of that. I am not made of the stuff to be a millionaire, but never fear that I could earn you bread sufficient, yes, and a couple of silk dresses a-year. Put off your marriage, at least. Say you are ill. You are ill; I can give you a sick certificate with a good conscience, and gain breathing time. In another few days——”

“The sacrifice will be harder than now, for every hour I live I shall care more—care less for the man whom it is my duty to love beyond all others. The day after to-morrow I shall marry Jack Chamberlayne, or die. Oh! M. Danton, if I could only die! Standing before the altar, if death would come, and your hand clasp mine till the last! Life can never hold happiness for me equal to that.”

And Leah speaks true; straight out from whatever soul she possesses. Honest poverty, work, hardship, sweetened by love—from the prospect of these she shudders, as she would sink beneath their weight in actuality. But that tragic, exquisite scene . . . the church, the parsons, the wealthy bridegroom . . . and the bride in her wreath and satins dying, in the arms of her true love, before them all! This melodramatic mixture of romance and reality; of love, with all the accessories of millinery and glitter which are the very breath of her nostrils; touches her to the quick.

“I am speaking of life, not death, Leah; of that fate which you hold between your hands, not of vague possibilities. Marry Chamberlayne and you will die, not picturesquely before the altar, but hideously, slowly, in the after-time, of the corrupting disease of wealth and fashion. Die, not in the flesh—that is little—but in the soul, and by your own suicidal hand!”

“You are hard on me—and I am weak,” she falters in reply.

"I must go, now, and try to rest. Will you say one—only one forgiving word to me, first?"

She is white as the dress she wears. If ever the prophetic look of heartbreak was on human face, it is on Leah Pascal's at this moment. And, reader, judge her not by your code or by mine, but by her own. She has been reared in the belief that poverty is disgrace, and love as opposed to interest a kind of disease, to be dreaded, shunned, and, if by chance it should assail you, overcome. Duty, to her mind, lies at present on the side of Jack Chamberlayne and against Danton. After marriage—well, after marriage, one must look round the world and see how other women in her position regulate their sentiments. But now, the money, the position unsecured, to vacillate is crime. And all the time she loves this man, at whose side she stands, with a miserable intensity of love to which some far better, far cleverer women could, perhaps, not rise. No foot-rule, moral or mental, can help us much in our judgments upon others' weakness or their strength. Calculating, mercenary, self-absorbed Leah, at least, loves with the concentration of a narrow nature; will sell herself—ay, because she must; yet has not breadth of purpose sufficient to tear her heart from what she desires—and abandons!

"Say one forgiving word to me . . . whatever I may become; say you will think a little of me as a friend while I live!"

"I shall love you always, Leah. And for the present, until the 'I will' is said that gives you to Jack Chamberlayne, I look upon you as mine."

So the "last words of the romance" are spoken.

CHAPTER XIX.

BELL BALTIMORE'S PHILOSOPHY.

TO-MORROW brings with it such relays of cooks, milliners, wine-porters, and hired waiters, as fairly take all the inmates of the house off their equilibrium. Bonchrétien with nightcap awry, flushed by delightful prophetic sense of general waste, and consequent profit to the firm, is here, there, everywhere. Cette pauvre chère Smeet, as upset as though she were to be married herself, mingles furtive tears of perfectly vague origin with the vanilla and orange-flower water that she infuses into the pastry, downstairs. The boarders snatch their meals as best they may, consoling themselves for the exceedingly short commons that Madame, in her wisdom, provides for them by the reflection of the good time coming. Lord Stair goes away to his club. The Prince Charming is seen, by fits and starts, somewhat red about the eyes ("Brandy," says old Mrs. Wynch, with cruel decision); and falling, whenever he gets a chance, into affectionate raptures over Deb and Naomi, the two blessed motherless girls who will remain to him!—raptures during which the children stand mute and shamefaced, not knowing whether they are expected to laugh or cry. Cousin Bell, the morning mysteries of the dressing-table over, spends her time exclusively in Leah's room.

"Poor Miss Pascal's nerves are naturally a little shaken." So remarks Bell into the sympathetic ear of Bonchrétien. "Under the circumstances, we should prefer dining together upstairs. Something plain and simple, an entrée or two, and a

bird, and champagne. Oh, these weddings!" And Bell raises her handkerchief to her eyes. "These weddings, my dear Madame, are always melancholy affairs enough when we come to the last."

Nerves a little shaken! Well—sal-volatile, rest, the sight of her trousseau finery, and three or four glasses of Clicquot, will doubtless bring her right. Mrs. Baltimore, in her sufficiently varied experience, has never known grief in which a like course of treatment has proved ineffectual. And *she* has forfeited the society of her husband, has separated for life from her children, been cut in turn by the whole of her good acquaintance, seen her dearest friend take her richest lover, and once—fearful climax!—ran the very narrowest chance of losing her eye-lashes after chicken-pox. Leah is evidently hipped. Looking dispassionately at Jack Chamberlayne, and bearing the "last words of the romance" and the face of our handsome tenor well in mind, can it be wondered at? So are women's lives constituted. Happily, their powers of forgetting go far towards rivalling those of men, although their external resources, under the first weight of trouble, may be more limited.

"If you were to cry, Leah, it would do you good. Not to the extent of disfiguring yourself for to-morrow, of course, but a good wholesome cry of about ten minutes. It relieves something on the brain. I remember the doctors telling me so when my sisters-in-law took Pussie and Floss away from me. And all these things are bodily! It does not do to confess it, my dear, but I have read numbers of medical books in my time, and, I must say, every day I live I grow more of a materialist. Cannot cry? Well, then use the smelling-salts constantly. The effect is nearly the same."

Leah sits before the fire. as she has done since she rose at

midday, inert, silent. She is in a dulled state of nerves, as one might be who, having made up his mind fully to the surgeon's knife, experiences already by anticipation the deathly painlessness that *succeeds* to pain.

"You are very kind, Bell. I believe you are sorry for me a little. And—and would you mind not talking at all about what I feel, please? When to-morrow comes I shall pull through it as well as other people do, no doubt, if I can only sleep a bit to-night."

"Laudanum might make you sleep," says Bell, well versed, like every woman of her type, in the science of narcotics. "Only it leaves that unmistakable look, not the look for a bride, about the eyes. And chloral, till one knows one's quantity, is an experiment. If I were to prescribe sincerely what I think would do you the most good, it would be—music. Just to go down to the salon, and hear two or three of M. Danton's charming songs. Ah, Leah, my child," and Bell's voice softens—positively something of womanly pity is in her cold blue eyes—"do you think I am really so blind as not to see how matters have stood between M. Danton and you?"

Leah starts, conscience-stricken : for a second, her impulse is to rise, fling herself upon her cousin's breast, and sob out her secret there. Then she remembers what Bell is—what she is so soon to be herself—and hardens back to steel.

"M. Danton?" How odd her voice sounds! When she is married, when all this living wretched present has become a dream, surely she will command it better when she speaks of him? "I think I may answer in the words you used last night, Bell : whatever my crimes may be, no one need accuse me of a weakness à la Maggie McDormond."

"Well, no," answers Bell, slowly, and fixing her eyes with

meaning on the girl's face, "Maggie McDormond sacrificed her interests to her passion. You have not sunk so low in my opinion, Leah, that I would suspect you of that."

"Of what do you suspect me, my dear Bell?"

"Of caring for M. Danton too much for your own happiness, Leah! That you have honestly tried to say the last words of the romance, I believe—the last words of the first volume of the romance," adds Bell, in spiteful parenthesis—"and that you found their taste bitter I know also. My dear child, do you think we have not all gone through the same thing? Why, before I married Mr. Baltimore——"

And then the hackneyed little fiction about the primeval sin—the one first, pure, uncalculating attachment—follows. Does the jaded woman of fashion live, in the great world, or the other world, who will not try to make you believe—yes, and herself, too—that she loved in her youth, and that true love, by cruelest circumstance rendered impossible, she has, of necessity, sunk to the thing she is?

"You see that your case is not exceptional" (this is the moral to Bell's fable). "Quite as much as you and M. Danton can possibly care for each other, *we* cared for each other. And now—now," says Bell, piously, "among all the mercies for which I have cause to be thankful, I esteem none greater than this—that I and my first love did not marry. Three or four years ago I came across him, married, eight children, a slatternly wife, and a dirty necktie. And that slatternly wife might have been me."

So much for Bell Baltimore's philosophy. Later in the day Colonel Pascal comes in to have a few parental words with the dear daughter he is so soon to lose. And to him Leah, for the first, probably for the last, time in her life speaks out some

portion of her mind without reserve. She is going to be Jack's wife to-morrow. No doubt of that. Every fine dress, every wedding present, packed away, is another proof of that. "Another nail in my coffin!" she says once—with such a ghost of a laugh—to Deb and Naomi. And yet—and yet—if a miraculous interposition were vouchsafed from Heaven—if Colonel Pascal's embroidered shirt-frills suddenly covered a beating, pitying human heart, the cup *might* pass from her! Give him the chance! As a drowning man clutches at a weed, an air-bubble, Leah, in her extremity, feels that she will risk the desperate chance of her father's support. Let conscience, at least, in after days have this salve—that had he chosen to stretch one finger out to her aid, she might have been saved.

"You are looking pale, my love." They are opposite each other, beside the fire; Bell and the children, by Leah's order, having left them alone. "I trust you find Melanie efficient?"—Melanie is the new French abigail, who is to accompany the happy bride to Italy, the first legitimate maid Leah has possessed—"otherwise, if there is anything Madame Bonchrétien can do, I am sure——"

"Melanie is quite efficient, thank you. With the assistance of Bell, and Bell's maid, and Deb and Naomi, my enormous trousseau will, I have no doubt, be packed in time."

"And there is really nothing in which I can help you?" The Prince Charming is curiously fidgety in manner; keeps on the side of the fire next the door, and most favourable for escape. "No letters to friends, or that sort of thing? Of course I shall see to the announcements in the English papers; Mrs. Baltimore undertakes to get a detailed account into the *Post*; and——"

"Father"—she rises abruptly, comes to his side, and looks

down at him straight, with her miserable, wistful eyes—"I wish to God I could get out of marrying Jack!"

Colonel Pascal gives a little jump, as though a hand had struck him. "Get out—of marrying—Jack?" he stammers, a full stop of breathlessness between each syllable.

"Get out of marrying Jack. I never pretended to care for him, as you know. And I was quite willing—oh, you need not speak, I wanted no coercion on your part! quite willing to sell myself to the highest bidder. But now that it comes so near—father—I hate it worse than I expected; I think it right to tell you so."

Colonel Pascal by this time has recovered his presence of mind.

"Your nerves are upset, Leah. All girls talk like this before their weddings. That you have no romantic attachment to poor Jack, I know; but the marriages that begin with romantic attachment do not, alas! end the best. When you have been Jack's wife three months——"

"Go on, sir."

"You—you will have grown accustomed——" begins Prince Charming, airily. But Leah interrupts him—oh, with what a gesture of profound contempt, for herself, for him!

"Have grown accustomed to my shame! That's the worst thought of all"—her head sinks upon her breast—"that one can grow accustomed, even to the degradation of such a marriage as this."

"I—I implore you not to speak so loud. If Bell—if one of the children should overhear!"

"If one of the children should overhear—well, in the time to come, it might be good that one of the children could say, 'On the night before her marriage, Leah shrank from herself. On

the night before her marriage, if our father had wished it, Leah might have been saved.' ”

Colonel Pascal takes out his delicate pocket-handkerchief and wipes his forehead. “I don't expect reason from you, Leah. I know whose daughter you are——”

“You had better not speak of my mother,” she interrupts, with quivering lips.

“But I do expect the common civility one member of society may look for from another. ‘Saved!’ I save you—with your wedding dinner spread, your wedding dresses packed! And all the time my conscience—my conscience,” repeats Colonel Pascal, solemnly, “is almost smiting me for permitting you to make so absolute a love-match. You marry without a settlement. If it should please Providence to remove poor Jack before the expiration of his nonage, his cousin Roberts will come into every shilling of the property. I must really confess, Leah, that I do not understand your language.”

“That is just it! You do not understand my language. I hope I shall keep pretty straight as Mrs. John Chamberlayne, papa.”

“I hope to heaven you will! Chamberlayne knows tolerably well what sort of disposition you have, and seems disposed to run the risk.”

“And, once married, a woman's actions are her husband's affair, are they not? It is only an unmarried daughter who can disgrace one. Papa, if to-morrow, at the very altar-steps, I was to lose courage—say the irrevocable ‘No,’ instead of the irrevocable ‘Yes’—should you look upon yourself as disgraced?”

Colonel Pascal's complexion turns to a ghastly shade of green—a hue such as no member of the outer world, I am sure, ever saw upon the sprightly, cheerful face of Prince Charming.

'If you do not marry Jack Chamberlayne, I am ruined! I don't talk of disgrace—of the scandal such unheard-of conduct must excite—I speak of money. Jack has become security for bills that I have no means whatever of meeting. Jack's money, as you insist upon the truth, is paying for your wedding clothes. Break with him, and not only *I* am ruined—Deb and Naomi, the children you pretend to love, are beggars with me.'

It would be difficult, it is unnecessary to Leah's story, to eliminate the grain or two of relative truth that may be hidden under Colonel's Pascal's words. Leah believes them. That is all with which we have concern. Leah believes them. And in doing so gives up her last chance of deliverance.

"You might have waited to fleece him, a few weeks, sir. You need not have sold me in advance."

This is all her answer. To Colonel Pascal's intense relief, a knock and message come just at this moment at the door; and a quarter of an hour later he is showing his white teeth down in the drawing-room, receiving felicitations, taking out his pocket-handkerchief as he speaks of the dear little, half-tearful, half-happy daughter he has quitted upstairs.

Deb and Naomi beggars! Well, her father's visit, after all, has proved tonic. As she listens to the children's merry chatter, as she watches Deb's small figure, flying hither and thither, in wild excitement, after the two grand ladies' maids, Leah feels that her marriage—the sacrifice that is to stand between them and ruin—cannot be wholly evil. (Among all the unwitting sophistries of conscience, is anything more curious than our different little modes of self-extenuation?) If these children are to be saved, it must be through her; and her only means of saving them is Jack Chamberlayne—or another.

The short autumn day dies into twilight. At last the whole

of the bridal dresses are packed ; Bell has gone to her room to write letters ; the ladies' maids have descended to their tea, and Deb and Naomi, left alone, begin to talk over the division of Leah's maiden wardrobe.

"I am to have the sprigged white muslin," says Deb. "It will make me two little evening frocks—Leah says so. And I am to have all the ribbons and flowers I can find, and the trimmings off the ball-dresses, to make dolls' clothes."

"I shall have the best velvet jacket," says Naomi. "It will not want taking in a bit : I have so much more figure than Leah ! The black dress spotted with gold I mean to put away till I wear trains, and the old brown silk, you see, Deb, will cut up at once into a tidy polonaise."

Leah, on this, jumps up from her place beside the fire, and crosses over to the corner where the children are reviewing their spoils. Deb's small lap is filled to overflowing with odds and ends of finery. The old brown silk—the dress in which Danton first saw Leah Pascal—is in Naomi's hands.

"Naomi, my sister, you should not discuss the property of a moribund until he has lost his sense of hearing. It is not delicate. What is that you are saying about my brown silk ?"

"Only—that it will make me a tidy polonaise," stammers Naomi. "Of course you are taking none of your old things with you. Melanie says brides never take away their old things."

"I am going to take my brown silk," says Leah, shortly. "But you need not shock Melanie's pride by telling her so. Never mind, Naomi," for Naomi, with her usual fine common sense, has placed herself in front of the dress with an air of battle. "I will give you—well, that new cream-coloured tussore that you admired so much, instead."

"The lovely tussore, out of your trousseau, instead of the brown silk!" cries little Deb. "Why, it's as old as the hills, Leah, and quite unfashionably cut. I heard Mademoiselle Melanie say so."

"The colour suits my complexion, Deb." Even the children are struck by the odd unsteadiness of her voice. "Bring a candle, one of you, and let us get it safely out of sight before the two fine ladies return."

And with her own trembling hands Leah Pascal puts the dress away—oh, that she could put away the memories connected with it as well!—jealously hidden under the silks and satins and fripperies of the future Mrs. Chamberlayne.

CHAPTER XX.

"CLAIRETTE."

"IN Paris, by special licence, on Wednesday, October 18th, John Frederick Chamberlayne, to Leah, eldest daughter of Colonel Pascal. The bride wore a *poult de soie* train, richly trimmed with Brussels lace over puffings of white tulle. The bodice was made with one of the new Henri Quatre basques, and had on it an exquisite spray of natural orange blossoms: the same was worn in the hair, and a magnificent Brussels veil. At six o'clock, p.m., the bridal party arrived at the chapel in the Avenue Marbœuf, and, under the courteous superintendence of the officials, ranged themselves near the altar, awaiting the coming of the bride. Presently the organ pealed forth Mendelssohn's delicious march, and the cynosure of all eyes entered the aisle, radiant in her fresh youth and happiness, on her gallant

father's arm. Among the company we especially noticed Lord Stair, who officiated, by proxy, as best man, and Sir George Luttrell, Bart. On their return to the Rue Castiglione, the distinguished party partook of a sumptuous collation previous to the departure of the bride and bridegroom. We hear that the destination of the youthful pair is Italy."

Thus the newspaper description, obtained through Bell Baltimore's influence, from the florid pen of "our special correspondent" in Paris. Now for unembellished prose.

A bride in white silk and Brussels lace—as far as clothing goes, our correspondent is accurate; pale as the dress she wears, tearless, awfully composed. An agitated father—good cause for agitation has Colonel Pascal, cogent business anxieties on the score of cheques, I O U's and bills, until the irrevocable blessing be spoken! A bridegroom primed—nay, one might almost write, over-primed—with absinthe. Substantial grown-up bridesmaids in blue, ethereal child bridesmaids in rose, and a bridal party comprising the more presentable inmates of Bonchrétien's house—Mrs. Tom-son gorgeous as a peony in magenta satin, the Comtesse gracefully antique in silver-grey, with a sprinkling of the Prince Charming's chance-made Paris friends, the pair of titles put upon record by our own correspondent—and Danton.

Up to the last moment Colonel Pascal, uneasily suspicious of the truth, scattered liberal hints through the establishment as to the expediency of M. Danton's absenting himself from the wedding. "Invited by Chamberlayne, certainly, and an excellent-hearted creature Chamberlayne is, but inconsiderate as a child. Under certain circumstances—ahem!—a gentleman—meritorious no doubt in himself, may not always have the *exact* coat for an occasion like the present. And nothing would be more pain-

ful to one's sense of delicacy than to hurt the feelings of so very charming—an artist."

But the meritorious gentleman himself has evidently not looked upon the coat difficulty as an insuperable one. Punctually as the clock strikes six, Danton arrives at the chapel in the Avenue Marbœuf. His is the first hand to grasp the bridegroom's at the altar-railing; his the one face which, veiled though she be, the bride discerns among the sea of faces around, as, leaning on her gallant father's arm, radiant in her fresh youth and happiness, she walks up the chapel!

"I require and charge you both, as ye will answer at the dreadful day of judgment"

Thus, according to the prescribed formula, does the priest, speaking unto the persons that shall be married, enjoin them if reason exist why they may not be joined together in Holy Matrimony now to confess it. And the bridesmaids simper over their bouquets—all save Deb, who, with tears flowing fast, is clasping her dabbled veil to her face. And Jack Chamberlayne looks as though he would fain the earth should open and swallow him. And Leah, despair at her heart, here in the presence of the man she loves with a love that renders any other union sacrilege, keeps silent. And the fashionable marriage goes on.

"Will the bridegroom have this woman to his wedded wife? Will he love, comfort, honour, and, forsaking all other, keep him only unto her, in sickness and in health, for evermore?"

Shaky and horribly nervous, yet not without genuine feeling in his voice, poor Jack pledges his vows with as much readiness as he would stake a hundred Napoleons on the running of a horse or a throw of the dice: and then comes the turn of the bride.

"Will Leah Pascal promise," Danton listening, "to obey,

serve, love, *honour*, Jack Chamberlayne, in sickness and in health, as long as they both shall live?"

And for a brief breathing space she hesitates: thinks of Danton, of herself, of the honest love which even yet might be their portion. Then all her girlish years, with their troubles, poverty, petty daily shifts and humiliations, sweep before her, as in that supreme lightning-flash of memory in which it is said a drowning man reviews every past detail of his life. She sees her mother's wasted face; she hears her father's hectoring, peevish voice as he talks of bills, ruin, dishonour; she sees Naomi and little Deb beggars. And then she becomes conscious that the clergyman is prompting her, sotto voce, that Naomi, with beauty unstained by tears, stands ready to unbutton her glove and hold her bouquet, and stammers forth the "I will," by which her soul is lost. "With clearness delightful to listen to," say those among the spectators who are near enough to catch the accents of the bride's voice.

So far, well. Now who giveth this woman to be married to this man? The Prince Charming, with a very pretty display of parental emotion, giveth her; at which affecting juncture some of the old ladies in the chapel have recourse to their pocket-handkerchiefs. And next the two plight their troth; the symbol of eternity is placed on Leah's cold hand; and Jack, too upset by this time to know the meaning of a word he utters, repeats, as he is told, that with this ring he weds, with his body worships, with all his worldly goods—soul-moving climax—endows her. And they kneel; and the priest, after joining their hands, pronounces them Man and Wife.

Colonel Pascal's fears, Danton's lingering hopes, Leah's vacillations, doubt, remorse—all are over.

Man and Wife—listening to intercessions for spiritual grace,

to prayers that they may so live together in this life that in the world to come they fail not of life everlasting ! The fashionable marriage (a few more psalms, and an unimportant homily or duty run through) is at an end. The bridegroom kisses his pal-wife ; the father kisses his daughter ; poor Deb, her finery piteously dishevelled, rushes up and clings to the bride's gracie Brussels skirt. Then comes the vestry business ; hand-shaking name-signing, felicitations. And then the common crowd is gratified by seeing Mrs. Chamberlayne, on her husband's arm, walk up the chapel. And the gamins waiting outside, expectant of half-francs, give a faint huzza as the young pair drive rapidly away in the smart hired carriage-and-pair that stands ready to convey them from the Avenue Marbœuf to the Rue Castiglione.

"And thank the Lord that part of the play is over," cries Jack, the second he is alone with his bride. "I have laughed pretty freely at other fellows in my time, and, by George, I know what it is myself, now ! I would as soon be shot as go through such a ceremony again."

"Well, I don't suppose you will have a chance just at present," says Leah, with a poor little attempt at jocularity. "You really were terribly nervous, Jack," she adds. "I was on tenter-hooks lest you should drop the ring, your hand shook so."

"You were cool enough for us both, at all events," retorts Jack. "But I believe women in their hearts like the raree-show of the whole thing. It shows *them* off, no matter what sort of figure the unhappy wretch of a man may cut."

"I hope we are not going to quarrel on our wedding-day, Jack ?"

"Quarrel ! I love you better than all the women I've ever seen put together," exclaims Jack. "And you looked as handsome as the deuce, Mrs. Chamberlayne, that you did, standing there

in your silks and laces, and with your cold, marble face. And now that it's over, and that I shall get rid of your family for ever, I mean to be the happiest fellow on the earth, I can tell you."

And putting his arm round her, with warmth detrimental to puffed tulle and Brussels trimming, he kisses her, for the first time in his life, on her lips. Primed, trebly primed is poor Jack, as I have written, and Leah shudders; then . . . remembering, tries not too palpably to recoil from her life's Lord and Master.

"One blessing at least we may be thankful for," says Jack, his good humour all restored. "We have none of your stuck-up affairs in the way of breakfast to look forward to. We had enough of that kind of thing in church. You have got hold of that singing fellow, Danton, I see, so we can make him tune up a bit to enliven us, and when dinner is over I will give you the 'Ten Little Niggers' in grand style, you see if I don't."

With this cheerful prospect in store, Leah gets out at Madame Bonchrétien's door. Désiré, in a pair of Colonel Pascal's cleaned white gloves, and with a bouquet as big as himself in his button-hole, dances forth to hand Madame Chamberlayne from her carriage. Splendid hired attendants throng the entrance—not the confectioner's men, in dingy sables familiar to London eyes, but gentlemen in pink silk calves and liveries that do not look tarnished by gaslight. Bonchrétien and *cette pauvre Smeet* advance, and claim a kiss, each, from the bride as she crosses the threshold.

"Don't forget the poor bridegroom," cries Jack in his shrill falsetto, and seizing Madame Bonchrétien round the waist, he salutes her loudly. Then Rose, the good-looking chambermaid, happening to peep, in a new set of ribbons, round the corner of

a door, he rushes off in wild pursuit of *her* down the corridor. Désiré winks at the hired liveries. Madame Bonchrétien and Miss Smith exchange significant looks. The bride, a cold smile on her lips, her head carried well in the air, walks upstairs alone to the deserted drawing-room.

A foolish incident like this may mean nothing or everything. To Leah, in her morbidly high-strung state of nerves, it means everything. "Lord Stair should have been here, in common fairness, to receive me," she thinks, with the bitter self-mockery of the wretched. "It only wants Milor's presence to make the parable complete!"

Lord Stair is not there to receive her, of course, but he arrives in one of the first carriages that convey the guests from the church. He is the first person to address Leah as "Mrs. Chamberlayne," and at once subsides, as by right, into close attendance upon her for the remainder of the evening. Jack knows no more about the etiquette of weddings than he knows about any other observance of decent life; and, his pursuit of Rose over, begins kissing the children, joking with the old ladies, with Colonel Pascal, with everybody. How cold Leah turns at every excited outburst of her husband's voice! How well she can imagine the fine bacchanalian spirit with which he will give them the "Ten Little Nigger Boys" by-and-by!

By seven all the guests have arrived, and Jack, under Pascal's directions, offers his wife his arm. They descend to the *salle-à-manger*, where immense brilliancy of gas, mock plate, and a profusion of flowers, chiefly paper, await them; not a bad display altogether, considering ways and means. The bride and bridegroom sit behind the cake; opposite them are the bridesmaids, with Lord Stair and Danton—everybody in festive mood. M. Danton and the prettiest Miss Sherrington rapidly

becoming friends, or more than friends; even Deb's tears drying at the thought of barley-sugar temples, silver-crowned Cupids, and a magnificent menial, in pink silk stockings, standing in attendance upon her own small person.

"My dear Madame Bonchrétien," cries Colonel Pascal, in his bland voice, "we have, I think, one cover too much;" indicating, with a wave of the hand, an empty chair about three places down on the right. "Sir George Luttrell," he consults a little programme of the table that lies by his plate. "Yes, Sir George should be next Mrs. Baltimore; if you would kindly have the chair removed."

Sir George is a short-sighted, very prim little man, who knows no one in the room, his host included. How he was picked up, at the eleventh hour, only Colonel Pascal can say. Why he was picked up, we have seen from our own correspondent's announcement to the *World of Fashion*. "We noticed Lord Stair and Sir George Luttrell, Bart., among the distinguished guests."

"If you will kindly have the chair removed, my dear Madame," repeats the Prince Charming, raising his voice.

Bonchrétien pantomimes energetically with hands and eyes; she turns red, she coughs; then despatches Désiré to whisper a ghastly truth into Colonel Pascal's ear. The vacant chair is for Mrs. Wynch.

Colonel Pascal, never a forgiving man, save to the rich, omitted purposely to bid his old enemy to the feast; Bonchrétien honestly forgot her existence. But the stout old warrior did not forget herself, or her rights. At a quarter past six, the wedding party still at church, Mrs. Wynch, in her snuffiest cap and gown, tottered down from her bed-room on the fourth floor, and took her place, as usual, at table. The hired liveries, the

barley-sugar temples and silver Cupids—none of these unwonted fineries did Mrs. Wynch see, or pretend to see.

“Désiré, où est Désiré? Il est six heures et demi sonné, et la soupe nong servie. Apportez-moi mong soupe.”

And then upon Madame Bonchrétien, hastily summoned by one of the hired men-servants, fell the task of explanation. The dinner would be at seven—of course Madame Wynch was aware we have a wedding in the house? Anything *cette chère dame* would command should be mounted to her apartment, and—

“*Cette chère dame* will take her dinner in the proper room, and in her own chair, as usual,” cried the old woman, with a kindling eye. “Seven o’clock, you say. You might have had the civility to warn me of the change of hour sooner. However, I’ll pass that over. You are an ignorant person, Madame Bonchrétien; you know no better. And see that my place is kept—three from the head of the table. And if any of that man’s guests occupy it, I shall tell ’em to move.”

What was a facile but mercenary Bonchrétien to do? Already whispers have reached her that Colonel Pascal, his eldest daughter off his hands, is likely to put the children to school, and betake himself to Monaco. And Mrs. Wynch is permanent; with a box of battered spoons and forks, real silver, with a poor little trinket-case of fifty years old jewels, all of which are likely to become Madame’s property, should Providence see fit that anything happen to Mrs. Wynch.

“The society will be en toilette, Madame Wynch, just the same as for evening party. If you don’t love the trouble of dressing——”

“I neither love it nor mean to take it, Madame,” was Mrs.

Wynch’s shrill interruption. “If I am fine enough for my own

company I am fine enough for Colonel Pascal and his friends, wedding or not."

And she keeps her word to the letter, stooping not even to the small concession of putting on her Sunday cap, or the well-known cotton velvet trimmed with ermine. With the guests in their places, the hired liveries solemn and upright, Colonel Pascal still under the effects of Désiré's awful whisper, in totters the little witch-like old woman, dirty, untidy, with head-gear awry, with malignant glance at them all, coughing horribly. She makes her way to the head of the table, and gets into the vacant chair—her chair—beside Sir George Luttrell, Bart.

Sir George Luttrell, Bart., too short-sighted to discern between a dirty old lady and a clean one, gives a polite half-bow; then draws himself together, after the manner of prim little men at dinner parties. Mrs. Wynch grunts.

Colonel Pascal feels the cold dews mount on his forehead. Give him time, however short, and the Prince Charming is a man who can explain away most of the embarrassments of this mortal life. "Eccentric, but wealthy. A dear old soul, if one must be frank, from whom we have great expectations." These things, and a dozen like unto them, would he whisper, extenuatingly, into Sir George's ear if it were possible. But not now—not now! How if one should try the desperate chance of appealing to Mrs. Wynch's own feelings of humanity? He tries it: bending forward with as much bonhomie of voice and manner as he can improvise, addresses her as his dear old friend. "So charmed that his dear old friend has found herself strong enough at the last moment to venture among them."

His dear old friend remains deaf and blind as destiny.

"Apportez ma vine, Désiré," she shouts, in her gruff, querulous tones. "Ma propre vine. Il reste un bong demi dans la

bouteille. Champagne? I hate champagne. Apportez la vine à moi. Il reste un demi dans la bouteille."

Sir George Luttrell, who knows no more of his host than his name, now feels sufficiently interested to take up his eye-glass, and examine his neighbour attentively. She gives him a civil nod in return.

"You are a stranger in this house, sir, I presume?"

The prim little baronet makes answer that he is a stranger.

"Then I advise you to keep to the vine ordinary. I've lived under Madame's roof eleven years, and we have had three moves. They say three moves are as bad as a fire. Any way, I have lost enough since first I came to her. Yes, I've lived with Madame Bonchrétien eleven years, and I know boarding-house wines pretty well. It's *all* ordinary, sir," in a confidential stage whisper, "only with different labels; brevet rank, I call it, for company. And as to champagne—no, I thank you," this to one of the hired waiters who, at Colonel Pascal's instigation, is attempting to fill her glass. "I never take anything in a boarding-house but what I pay for myself. It saves unpleasantness in the end."

After such an exhibition, of what avail is further attempt at grandeur? Where is one's conversational intimacy with the peerage? Where are one's own familiar Lords, Dukes, and Lady Marchionesses? Sir George, with the pleasure common to us all at witnessing the discomfiture of others—Sir George, who, with a pretty and creditable woman on either hand, might not have opened his lips a dozen times, becomes quite filial in his attentions to Mrs. Wynch; and the whole company is enlivened by the tones of her shrill, piercing voice. Boarding-houses in general and this boarding-house in particular; pretentious snobbism, mercenary fathers, mercenary daughters,

'petty cravies' and the probable fate that lies before them—not a subject but has some Rembrandt-like light thrown upon it by Mrs. Wynch, and with a force and trenchancy impossible for any one at the table to misunderstand.

"The old soul is worth her weight in gold," whispers Jack to his bride. "Keeps us all alive, and puts Papa in his place. By Jove, I never saw Papa look so crestfallen before. If the old witch would only make him forget the speechifying."

But Colonel Pascal has his eye on speech-maker number one, the inevitable parson, already. Speechifying will, at least, silence Wynch's lips; at least hasten on the time when the feast shall be at an end, the last bottle of chemical champagne opened.

The inevitable parson proposes, of course, the health of the bride and bridegroom; is jocular, serious, jocular again, as he has been at a good many scores of wedding feasts before, and there is a great clinking of glasses and wishing of health to bride and bridegroom (distinct among the hum of other voices, how Leah hears *one* voice speak those words!). And then poor Jack finds himself all of a sudden on his legs, stammering forth reiterated imbecilities as best he may, anathematizing marriage as even he, with all his predilections, never anathematized it before, in his soul.

Colonel Pascal's health is drunk next, Lord Stair the proposer; and very neat and touching is the speech, prepared three weeks since, in which he responds. This is the happiest, and yet, perhaps, the saddest day of his existence. He loses a daughter, he gains a son. ("Do you, by Jove!" mutters Jack between his teeth.) The kind friends by whom he is surrounded will sufficiently appreciate the depth of his emotions to pardon his want of eloquence; but when we feel most, we feel in silence. . . .

Leah, my girl, heaven bless you! And then the Prince Charming falls back into his chair, while a couple of real tears stand in his hawk eyes—a sight for gods and men!

The bridesmaids, the groomsmen, the parson, Madame Bon-chrétien—everybody's health is drunk in succession; and the chemical champagne begins to take effect, on Jack's unsteady nerves and weak head most of all.

"You have not given us a speech, Monsieur," he cries, across the table, to Danton, whose flow of high spirits continues still unbroken. "The only man here who has not made a speech, and, by —, you must give us a song instead. Mrs. Chamberlayne," turning with maudlin affection to his bride, "what do you say? Monsieur Danton must give us a song, eh?"

How can Mrs. Chamberlayne, thus appealed to, help looking across the table at Danton! There is a look in her eyes almost of physical pain—a blank, frightened look, that one would say must stir any man's heart to compassion. But the glance that comes back to her from Danton is cold as steel: no more mercy in it than she might expect from Lord Stair or from her own father. What right has she to look for mercy from any man on the face of God's earth save him who sits beside her, with glazing eyes and thickened utterance—her husband?

"No song, no supper. Come, Monsieur, we won't accept excuses. You have had your supper, now for the song. Miss Sherrington, use your influence. Monsieur Danton, I am sure, cannot refuse you anything."

Miss Sherrington, the blue-eyed bridesmaid, into whose ear Danton has been whispering pretty things during the past hour, simpers and blushes, and would like so much—oh! so very much—to hear M. Danton's voice. She is sure he must have a *lovely tenor* voice, and——

"We may perhaps hope for a little music in the drawing-room by-and-by," says Colonel Pascal stiffly, from the head of the table.

"When my wife and I are gone," interrupts Jack, with his accustomed frankness. "But you see we want to have the benefit of a little music ourselves. Now, Danton, let us hear the lovely tenor—none of your fine classical symphonies, but something we all know out of 'Madame Angot' or 'La Périchole.' If you don't tune up quickly, I'll give you the 'Ten Little Nigger Boys' myself, see if I don't."

At this awful threat Leah gets courage to speak. "It would indeed be very kind of M. Danton" . . . she begins, this time without lifting her eyes above the level of her plate. . . . And, whether through pity or some very widely different feeling, who shall say? Danton obeys her wish instantly, and sings a song, chosen, as Jack desired, from the familiar opening scene of "Madame Angot."

In aftertimes Leah may think it would have been better if Jack had given them the "Ten Little Nigger Boys," *chin obligato* and all, than she have had the burthen of "Clairette" ringing for ever through her heart as an accompaniment upon her wedding-tour.

"Certainement j'aimais Clairette;
Mais dois-je mourir de chagrin,
Quand peut-être une autre conquête
Peut me venger de son hymen."

Danton goes through the song admirably; every note clear and melodious; the little air of half-tender, half-mocking resignation to fate that the words require, given to perfection. Every one is delighted; the bridegroom most of all.

"Wait a bit," he cries, "Monsieur! Wait till your own wedding comes, and see if you are in as fine tune then. An easy thing, by George, to make merry at other men's executions as long as your own neck continues free of the halter."

And now Colonel Pascal begins to glance meaningly at the bride, and the ladies take up their bouquets. In another five minutes Bonchrétien is already contesting over the spoils of the feast with the hired footmen; and Leah, as she displays her presents in the salon, knows that the time draws on apace when her hand will meet Danton's in a last farewell; knows that the time draws on apace when she will go away from the old life for ever—the old girlish life that, by contrast, already seems sweet—Jack Chamberlayne's wife.

Ten o'clock strikes, the bride is cloaked ready for departure, the carriage that is to take Mr. and Mrs. Chamberlayne to their hotel in the Rue de Rivoli is at the door. She must speak to him once more, she feels, if she die for it, yes, even with the burthen of "Clairette" ringing in her ears. It happens that Danton just now stands alone in the inner drawing-room. His capacity for saying pretty things to Miss Sherrington seems exhausted. His noisy spirits are gone. A kind of sick, weary look is on his face. Abruptly the bride crosses both rooms and is at his side. Last night she would have invented an excuse for such an action—a book forgotten on the table, the name of that song M. Danton promised her. She needs no pretext, she thinks of no small proprieties now.

"Do you, can you forgive me?" she stammers, a whole lifetime of agony in her voice.

Danton turns and looks at her, looks straight into the clear, golden eyes that have betrayed him.

"I told you beforehand I should forgive you," is his answer,

uttered without a shade of hesitation in his voice. "I do more. I thank you."

As cruel a speech, perhaps, after a good many centuries of cruelty, as any man ever made to any woman. Leah feels that no further blow can hurt her now.

"I thank you." She repeats his words automatically, intending neither sarcasm nor reproach. Then turns quietly away, goes back among the guests, and puts her hand under her husband's arm.

"Better get our good-byes over, Jack, had we not? Papa is looking unutterable entreaties to us to depart."

"Papa cannot want us to leave more sincerely than we want to leave him," growls Jack, who has only just made his appearance in the drawing-room. "Not another glass of wine, not as much as a soda-and-brandy to be had in the house 'by Colonel Pascal's instructions.' If I had only known, I would have paid for the whole affair myself, straight off."

After which gentle reproach the leave-taking begins. The Prince Charming, the little sisters, Bell Baltimore, press forward to kiss the bride. There is much hand-shaking, there are many and loud felicitations. And then Leah descends the stairs on her husband's arm, and goes forth through the chill, murky air of the autumn night to her carriage.

The wedding guests all throng outside the porte cochère; old shoes are in readiness for throwing; even Mrs. Wynch, the fatal death's head at the feast, gropes her way forth, and shrieks a shrill adieu that sounds like a malediction upon the newly-wedded pair.

"Bless you, my girl; bless both of you, my children," says Colonel Pascal, looking in at the carriage window, and at the same time signing to the coachman to have his reins ready,

'Poste restante, Como,' will be your first address, and you have promised to write daily. God bless you."

And they start. The horses, restless at waiting, plunge a little just at getting off, and Leah has an excuse for putting her head through the window and looking back. Danton, who wished neither bride nor bridegroom farewell, stands somewhat apart from the other guests on the pavement; and for one moment these two death-white faces confront each other, full.

One moment: then all is over. The first part of Leah Pascal's life-drama is acted out.



CHAPTER XXI.

THOSE DIAMONDS!

SHIFT the scene, and raise the curtain upon another act. The season of the year, June; the place, a Bayswater drawing-room; personages, Mr. Charles Robarts, barrister-at-law, and Hetty his wife.

The smart Louis Quinze timepiece above the fireplace points to seven, and Mr. and Mrs. Robarts, in dinner array, await the coming of their brougham. *Their* brougham—possessed eight weeks, and whereof the paint still smells! Their brougham—of whose very coachman they stand in awe, and which, for every practical purpose of use and enjoyment, is so inferior to the hired vehicles of old days, the good old days when Hetty's arts had as yet failed to beguile her husband into the toils of "a carriage of our own," and liveries.

Mr. Robarts is the cousin to whom, had Providence removed

Jack Chamberlayne in his nonage, the Chamberlayne property would have reverted ; may still revert—Jack will not attain his legal majority till October. It is with Jack and his wife that the Robartses are to dine this evening. The men have already met since the return of bride and bridegroom to London. The ladies have yet to make each other's acquaintance ; and Mrs. Hetty's war-paint and accoutrements have, you may be sure, been put on with extra determination of hard hitting and no quarter for the occasion.

"I try my utmost not to be prepossessed against our Jewish relative, Charles. From all that I can gather respecting her style and manner, and considering that a woman like Mrs. Baltimore is her associate, it is impossible that we can be sympathetic. But I shall try to tolerate this wife of your unfortunate cousin's, as a duty."

Mrs. Robarts is a small, clear-voiced, clear-featured woman of between thirty and forty. She had fifteen thousand pounds of her own, for which fifteen thousand pounds it is thought Mr. Robarts married her, and she has a temper and an intellect ; sings, writes, is good in private theatricals, models in clay, and has a whole list of little Platonic flirtations with celebrities. She has also five small children, in steps, who have also tempers and intellects. "Theophilus, my eldest boy, dreams in German," says Hetty. "Yes, indeed. I frequently make Mr. Robarts listen to him in his sleep. Alphonso, the second, is passionate, simply passionate for music ; and the girls, infants though they are, are artists. What my Hetty can do with scissors and a sheet of paper is amazing."

Her babies, their perambulators, their intellects ; herself, her brougham, her intellect, comprise Hetty's scheme of the universe—with, of course, such minor adjuncts as her excellently managed

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Bayswater household, her servants, her husband. In her dress you may discover the key-note of her character, as you may in the case of ninety-nine women out of every hundred. She buys handsome, well-cut clothes, goes to the fountain-head for jewelry, follows fashion with Spartan exactness in the matter of hats and bonnets, and yet for ever strikes harshly on the beholder's sense—a picture painted with the finest colours, on the finest canvas, by a bungler's hand! Purple, yellow, red; every rainbow hue will Hetty boldly wear, giving no thought either to her complexion or the occasion, and ignoring all those becoming veils and ruffles, those unexpected knots of lace and velvet which, in the hands of women who attire themselves by instinct, not rule, are the very poetry of dress.

In upholstery it is the same. Mrs. Robart's colouring is what, without malice, may be set down as the sallow-British; cheek, hair and eyelash all palely similar. Yet are the hangings of her drawing-room sea-green, unrelieved by a spot of kindly crimson or all-relieving white. At one end of the room is a portrait, life-size, of Hetty herself, leaning, as on a pedestal, across the shoulder of meekly-sitting Mr. Robarts. Upon a console between the windows is a bust of Hetty in marble; upon a bracket, somewhere else, a statuette of Hetty in terra cotta. Scientific German treatises are to be found scattered about, together with the latest volume of esoteric verse by the latest fashionable poet, and Mrs. Robarts's own novel—Hetty has actually written, and, at considerable expense to Mr. Robarts presented to the public, a three-volume novel. Chairs, tables, sofas, all have been chosen according to the highest published standard of Art in domestic life. And still, with the sea-green hangings, with that portrait of Mr. and Mrs. Robarts grimly staring at you, with Hetty presiding, perhaps, over her

"harlequin" tea-service in a mauve of the wrong shade—still is the result incongruous, jarring.

Dine with them, and the influence of Hetty's taste becomes still more apparent. Mr. Robarts himself—a caustic, silent man, possessed of much common sense—would, if he had a voice in the matter, give you a well-roasted leg of mutton, a bottle of fair claret, and have you waited on by a decent parlour-maid—the style of entertainment which, without fear of criticism, an honest, hard-working man may offer a prince. Hetty has *dîners Russe*, invariably badly cooked (oh, those entrées of Hetty's—those ragoûts and salmis that will not yield to the refined influence of fork and bread, but demand cold steel for their severance!) *Dîners Russe*, æsthetic talk, and a succession of cheap fine wines, wrongly served by the Brummagem brand-new footman, in ridiculous livery, who stands, too big for the room, behind poor Robarts's chair.

"We shall, I suppose, have to invite the Chamberlaynes in return, Charles. The difficulty will be to know whom to ask to meet them. I assume, as you are taking me to dine there, she really is——"

"Really is——?" repeats Mr. Robarts, absently. "I did not quite catch the drift of your remark, my love."

"A person of unblemished reputation, Mr. Robarts. This notorious Mrs. Baltimore is, I am told, already her most intimate friend."

"Scarcely that, I think, Hetty. Jack Chamberlayne's wife has been pointed out to me two or three times in the Park, and on each occasion——"

"Why do you hesitate?"

"I am afraid of shocking you by mentioning some one more notorious than Mrs. Baltimore."

"I did not know such a person could exist," says Hetty. "And considering the ruin your cousin's marriage has entailed upon our innocent children, I certainly cannot look upon anything connected with them in the light of a joke."

"I am not joking in the least, my dear Hetty, neither do I look upon the ruin of our innocent children as a confirmed fact. The person whom I have always seen in Mrs. Chamberlayne's society is—not the notorious Mrs. Baltimore, but Lord Stair."

"*Lord Stair!* And who is that, Charles—a law lord or a real one? Is he good-looking—is he young? Do you think we shall be likely to meet him there to-day?"

For Hetty, much though she loves art and literature, loves the peerage more. The best among us has his price; a title is Hetty's; and titles are so desperately hard to come by in plebeian Bayswater! A tarnished Honourable, the wife of a Knight, and a rickety Dean—higher prizes than this has Hetty never yet grasped for any of her afternoon teas or evening receptions. How if this new cousin—reputation or no reputation, Jew, heretic, or Christian—should prove a stepping-stone to the nobility!

"By referring to the peerage," says Mr. Robarts, gravely, "we ascertain that George Francis, Lord Stair, is the fifth viscount of that name, and forty years of age. In former days his lordship was, I believe, an outlaw from his country for debt; and, if report speaks true, is still, in spite of his ugliness, one of the greatest lady-killers extant. Look after your peace of mind, Hetty, if we do meet him. You don't know the fascinations of these Fools of Quality."

"Indeed, I was in the daily habit of meeting the aristocracy before I married," says Hetty. "My mamma's visiting-list

comprised more titles than commoners. Only to look over the franks on her old letters will show you in what kind of circle my mamma's family moved. But you have always your little sneer ready, Mr. Robarts."

In spite, however, of this small breeze matrimonial, Hetty's frame of mind is amiable, as "our brougham" bears her along eastward towards Piccadilly. "Mrs. Chamberlayne may be dressed in what she will," thinks Hetty, with a complacent glance at her own brilliant display of lilac, crape, and satin. "My dress is Gask and Gask's last, and the fashion of my hair has only been out a week, and no one can go higher than the highest. If Lord Stair should be there, he must at least detect the difference in our *style*. And as to Mrs. Baltimore——"

"If Mrs. Baltimore is of the party, I trust most sincerely they will have the good taste not to introduce her to us," she remarks to her husband, as the brougham slackened speed, about midway along Piccadilly. "Lord Stair is, of course, beside the question. See that my hair is right, Charles; are you certain the flower is in its place? A man may have been wild in his youth, yet the world think no worse of him later on—above all, a man in such a position as Lord Stair's. And your cousin's wife I mean to tolerate on principle. I will not know your cousin's wife's disreputable female friends."

"Let us hope they will only have invited men to meet us, then," says Mr. Robarts.

Mindful of their precarious tenure of riches, mindful of the fact that every sovereign they touch is transmitted to them at present through the fingers of the Israelites, Jack and his wife are living, "for economy," in one of the most extravagant private hotels in London, an arrangement made for them by their friend and Mentor, Lord Stair. "In an hotel one knows

one's expenses to a shilling," says poor Jack. "And if, after all, I drop off the perch before October, my inconsolable widow will not be saddled with a house and servants." An extravagant private hotel as the basis of their joint expenditure. Carriages and horses, an opera box, jewelry and dresses without stint, on the side of the wife. On the side of the husband, every costly superfluity of the old bachelor life—the "snuff-boxes, watches, heads of canes, et cetera"—by which now, as in the days of Lord Chesterfield, idle gentlemen contrive to bring their pockets to the same condition as their brains, with the heavy addition of nightly loo and lansquenet. So Mr. and Mrs. Chamberlayne have made their entrance into the big world of fashion and of folly.

Hetty, a little short-breathed at the thought of possible viscounts, mounts the stairs on her husband's arm, and finds herself ushered into a room sweet with natural flowers, amber-lighted, cool, on the first floor—a room that Leah's presiding taste has rendered as little like the conventional stiff drawing-room of a London hotel as possible. Jack, his feet higher than his head, sits rocking himself in an American chair at an open window, his eyes closed. An odd volume of a library novel lies beside him on the carpet.

" How are you, Charles—well? And, Hetty, how does time use you? Why, we have not met for ages. Extensively got up, by Jove! Hope you didn't expect a party, or that sort of thing. I am just as little of a dandy as I always was."

Marriage has certainly wrought no improvement on Jack's outer man. He is somewhat thinner, somewhat more hectic than when we saw him last in Paris; and certain haggard lines, telling of increased fast living, or evil temper, or both,

have gathered round the weak, worn lips and shallow forehead. His dress—is what it always was! At first Leah tried to reform him, as far, at least, as the wearing of evening clothes was concerned; and while the honeymoon lasted Jack obeyed. Alas! the honeymoon was of briefest duration, and with it fled Jack's allegiance—on other vital points besides those of white ties and black coats.

"Never can see the fun of making an absurdity of oneself because the sun has set, Mrs. Robarts. Of course, if I was Charles—Well, as I am, if I and Mrs. Chamberlayne led the same ball-going lives I should have to do it. But Mrs. Chamberlayne and I do not lead the same ball-going lives—not by any means!"

Hetty, who has subsided amidst her lilac clouds upon a sofa, gives an expressive "ah!" and a look at her husband.

"You must have enjoyed the freedom of the Continent, Jack," remarks Mr. Robarts. "At least one is not bored by all the dressing and dining, and formality of this London life of ours abroad."

"Enjoyed!" Jack returns to the rocking-chair and former position, only, out of deference to Hetty's presence, perhaps, with his feet about two inches *lower* than his head. "Enjoyed! Yes, very like enjoyment, indeed. We stayed at the Italian lakes first, in pouring rain. Three weeks of that." He shudders: those three weeks comprised the honeymoon. "Turin, Milan, Florence, next—filthy weather at them all. Then Rome."

"Ah—Rome! The glories of the Eternal City," cries Hetty, adjusting her bracelet, and giving a glance at the door, her thoughts still running upon viscounts.

"Well, I don't know that I detested it as much as the rest

of Italy," Jack proceeds. "I met with fellows I knew there, and we had something like sport to kill the time with. Still, Rome is a deuced slow place to stop in. Boring about catacombs and coliseums may be very well for a couple of days; but when you have done one ruin you have done them all. And as to the club—I never saw anything that you could really call play there, from first to last. No, the only place I could abide, out of the lot, was Monaco. We stopped there a fortnight on our way back . . . lost a pot of money between us, I can tell you, for Mrs. Chamberlayne is as big a gambler as you ever saw . . . but on the whole it was not as deadly as the rest. We had no rain at Monaco, at least, and no ruins."

"I cannot imagine a *woman* finding pleasure in gambling!" says Hetty, with her cruel little italics. "But then I am so thoroughly English in my tastes. Now, tell me truly, Mr. Chamberlayne, do you like the sight of a woman gambling?"

"I like the sight of a pretty woman doing anything," says Jack. "And in the case of a wife, I doubly like the sight of her doing anything that has the effect of putting her in a good humour. Ah, here you are, Bell!" jumping up with such alacrity as to send the rocking-chair flying. "I was just beginning to think you had forgotten the hour."

And upon this, the figure of a new guest enters the room; a slight, upright figure, equipped in clouds of billowy black tulle, with here and there an artistic touch of scarlet—and diamonds.

"I could have told by instinct who it was, even had Mrs. Baltimore's name not been announced," says Hetty, afterwards. "Those diamonds were either real or false. If they were false—I have heard my mamma declare that the wearing of sham jewels is the most unerring index we possess to a woman's cha-

racter. If they were real—we all know that such a display, by daylight, is simply the mark of a class."

So Bell must have fared indifferently had she been on trial—for the crime of witchcraft, say—with Hetty Robarts as her judge!

CHAPTER XXII.

ON FINAL CAUSES.

"HETTY, my dear," cries Jack, "let me introduce my cous'n, Mrs. Baltimore. Bell, Mrs. Robarts, another cousin. Upon my word, it seems that we are all cousins together, after a fashion."

Hetty inclines her head, just sufficiently to bring the movement within the outside limits of a salutation. Bell, in return, gives a frozen stare out of her half-shut blue eyes, and moves away, with a smile, to Jack's side. Mr. Robarts looks sheepish, as most men do when these kind of feminine amenities are brought unmistakably beneath their notice. Happily, before matters have had time to grow serious, the announcement of Lord Stair's name causes Hetty's muscles to relax from their rigidity, and in another minute a door at the farther end of the room opens. There is the soft frou-frou of silk—Leah enters; and even Mr. Robarts, despite the presence of his own lawful Hetty—even Mr. Robarts, hardened man of briefs and parchment though he be, is sensible that with her come freshness, perfume, music, all the exquisite poetry that a lovely woman in her youth can shed upon our commonplace unlovely life.

Her dress, a hundred-guinea trifle of Worth's, is a combina

tion of white and amber (Leah's old colours), relieved by ruffles of fine lace at the throat and sleeves. A dress very different in cut and texture to those poor silks at six francs a yard that Leah Pascal used to make up with her own hands in her days of poverty! Her complexion, though purely clear as ever, has lost a little of its look of health, perhaps may go from white to red more quickly than it was wont. The golden-brown eyes have in them a keener expression than of old; almost you might call the expression one of pain if you were disposed to be hypercritical; and her cheek, by just a shade, has lost its roundness. The drudgery of a London June, the wear and tear of that hard work called pleasure, already tell; and yet—yet is Leah Chamberlayne handsomer far than was Leah Pascal! What the face once wanted it has gained. On the transparent cheek, and through the saddened eyes, the soul's expansion is beginning, tardily, to shine.

"Better late than never," cries Jack, sharply, as he pauses for a moment in his whispers to Bell. "Mrs. Chamberlayne, my cousin Robarts, and Hetty."

Leah advances, with an outstretched hand of conciliation. "So very glad to meet you, Hetty. I may say 'Hetty,' may I not? How do you do, Mr. Robarts? I know both of you well from the photographs in Jack's book. Ah, Lord Stair!" recognising his lordship by a friendly little smile, but no shake of the hand. "Let me introduce Lord Stair—Mrs. Robarts, Mr. Robarts."

It is obvious, then, that Leah and Lord Stair have already met to-day! Hetty records this, as she records other trifling details on her brain's tablet, for future use.

Dinner is announced almost immediately, and Jack, who never acknowledges any law of etiquette save his own imme-

diate amusement, gives his arm, not to Mrs. Robarts, the guest of honour, but to Bell Baltimore. Thus Lord Stair has to take Hetty, and Leah falls to Mr. Robarts. The party, however, is so small that conversation must, perforce, be general during dinner. And a curious polyglot of conversation it is! Mrs. Baltimore and Jack Chamberlayne talk openly and freely for their own edification—the royal legend of England their motto. Hetty, with rather limited success, attempts Shakespeare and the musical glasses for Lord Stair; Mr. Robarts eats his dinner, and falls at every minute into deeper admiration of his hostess. Leah, herself, is simply charming—I must for once borrow Colonel Pascal's word—to everybody. She smiles at the jests of her husband and Bell Baltimore, yet by the smile refines them; talks nearly up to the requisite intellectual mark with Hetty; subjugates Mr. Robarts as we have seen, and keeps Lord Stair, —although she scarcely seems to address a word to him—in good temper with himself and with her. The majority of neophytes must serve an apprenticeship, oftentimes a long and weary one, before they can command this kind of tone, “the polite jargon,” as our grandfathers called it, “of good company.” To Leah none has been necessary. She is well bred by temperament, mistress without effort or consciousness of the art of putting others at their ease; that art which, whether you term it tact or veneer, is practically about the most desirable in the world for a woman belonging to yourself to possess.

So, in spite of polyglot conversation and warring elements, the dinner passes off well. One of Jack Chamberlayne's few virtues is a horror, amounting to eccentricity, of sham or show. None of your diners Russe, with floral decorations, and delicate pink paper menus for Jack. He will give his friends the best meat, fish, and game in season, plainly served, and accompanied

by as good a bottle of wine as money can buy ; but all in the rough. By his special orders one servant only must enter the room at a time ; there is no ornament but snowy damask on the table ; and dessert is served, as it used to be when Jack was a small boy, on the mahogany. This kind of dinner puts men in spirits. We all love art and elegance, of course, but still we all feel relieved, as of a load, when, just for once, art and elegance are put aside. By the time they arrived at their strawberries even Lord Stair has grown talkative, and Mr. Robarts—Mr. Robarts has volunteered two distinct and original remarks, without reference to his wife !

“Every one in town has heard this nice little scandal about the Lyttons, I suppose,” cries Bell Baltimore. Very sweet is Bell in voice and manner ; experience has taught her when she cannot slay to smile ; yet how thoroughly does the tone of that word “every one” make Hetty Robarts feel herself classed among the great army of the world’s nobodies ! “You must remember Tom Lytton, of the Greys, Lord Stair ? He married the second Sparkes girl, last winter.”

“Tom Lytton has sent the second Sparkes girl back to her mamma, has he not ?” says Lord Stair. “I heard something about it this afternoon at the club.”

“What, Lulu Sparkes ?” asks Jack, with more interest than he usually shows in any scandal of the moment. “Was that the girl we used to see at Scarborough, Bell—the girl with fair hair, who was so sweet upon her cousin Conway ?”

“The very same,” Bell answers. “Everybody in London knew about the attachment, except Tom Lytton, who had just come back with his regiment from India. And now, six months after their marriage, the whole buried romance has, it seems, come to his knowledge. Letters, even, containing vows of

eternal fidelity (it really was only an innocent boy-and-girl flirtation—Teddy Conway is not two-and-twenty yet,) locks of hair, dried flowers. Why will people persist in keeping locks of hair and dried flowers? There is a frightful domestic scene. Lulu confesses. Lulu's mamma confesses. Why will people persist in making confessions? And then Mrs. Lytton finds herself quietly sent back 'for a lengthened visit' to her own people. I call it hard."

"I call it just," says Jack, the blood rising over his thin face. "Innocent boy-and-girl flirtation, indeed! I don't believe in innocent flirtations. If I found that my wife had compromised herself before she married, I would do the same. I say that a man's honour is as much affected by the follies of a woman's past life as by those of her present one."

Not a fluctuation of colour comes to Leah's cheek, not the shade of a quiver round Leah's lips. Only she gives one rapid instinctive glance at Lord Stair, *who watches her*, and her eyes sink again upon her strawberries. "The follies of a woman's past life." Her one supreme, all-compromising folly—the starlit walk in the Champs Elysées, the café chantant, the dress with the fatal golden mouches . . . every detail of that October night, rises up before her, illumined by the sharp white light of sudden terror! She knows what kind of generosity she might look for, should discovery come, from her husband; realizes, as she never realized before, how utterly, if indeed he recognized her, her fate, her honour, rest in Lord Stair's hands.

Lord Stair laughs, in his silent, well-bred way. His face is amiably expressionless as that of a royal prince at a ceremony. "And I, Chamberlayne, when I marry, shall concern myself no more with the past than with the present. Absolute liberty,

perfect reliance on both sides, is my ideal of wedded happiness."

"Naturally. I talked in the same fine way myself when I was a bachelor," growls Jack.

"And, however you may talk, you think in the same fine way still," cries Bell, resting her white hand an instant on Jack Chamberlayne's arm. "You never could hope to succeed in the tragic line, Jack," she adds, pleasantly. "And as I really am too good-hearted to enjoy my friends' failures, I warn you, in time, not to attempt it."

Everyone laughs, except Mrs. Roberts. Oh, the stab a woman can inflict when she chooses by not laughing! and with some adroit little remark from Lord Stair the conversation changes; changes, but by no means fades from Mrs. Hetty's remembrance.

"And if ever two people trod the high road to ruin, your cousin Jack and his wife are treading it now." Thus she remarks, in matrimonial confidence, as "our brougham" rolls back to Bayswater. "Oh, I know what you will say, Charles—you have had a wider experience of life than mine. You hold your own latitudinarian notions, of course, and you have had experience of the *half-world*, as it is called, which, I am thankful to say, I am without; so I cannot expect you to feel as shocked and disgusted with the whole entertainment as I do."

Mr. Roberts arouses himself from his nap in the corner of the brougham, a nap in which he still hears the low fresh tones of Leah's voice, and feels the magic of her glance. "Disgusted? Why, Hetty, I thought we never spent a jollier little evening. You got on pretty well with Lord Stair at dinner, did you not?"

"Lord Stair was exceedingly glad to make my acquaintance—quite surprising how many mutual acquaintance we found to talk about. Indeed, on my mamma's side I am by no means sure there is not a relationship. It struck me, Charles, whatever you may think, that Lord Stair must have been taken aback at seeing a person like myself in such company?"

"It struck me that Lord Stair pays more devoted attention than is strictly necessary to Leah," says Mr. Robarts, sleepily. "But really, amongst these sorts of people——"

"Leah!" What in the world do you mean, Mr. Robarts, by speaking of your cousin's wife as 'Leah?' We may dine with the Chamberlaynes, it may possibly be our duty to ask them to dinner in return—it is perfectly unnecessary that we should ever be on terms of familiarity with either of them—with her, especially. Talking of familiarity reminds me of something which you probably did not observe. Lord Stair *twice* called Mrs. Chamberlayne by her Christian name. To me that is all-sufficient. Delicately placed as we are, and considering that you are still the presumptive heir to the Chamberlayne property, I have no alternative but to know her——"

"It is a very pleasant alternative, Hetty. I say nothing about moralities—I don't meddle in matters too high for me; but, as regards the surface only, Jack's wife seems to me one of the nicest women we have met for a long time."

"She is intensely artificial," says Hetty. "Not a look, or tone, or movement but is studied. Her spirits are forced. The very colour on her cheek goes or comes at command. And what extraordinary yellow eyes! And then the unmistakable nose! You may be certain Lord Stair does not admire her, really."

"Ah! you think so."

"But alas! a married woman who lays herself out for it, can always command a *certain kind* of attention. I was surprised, Mr. Roberts, to see you shake that other creature's hand when we came away."

"As you had passed her without bowing, my dear Hetty, and as the other creature had the good feeling and forgiveness to hold out her hand to me, it would have been rather difficult for me to do otherwise."

"It is never difficult, Charles, to do the thing that is right. Mrs. Baltimore is . . . no, I have no language in which to speak of Mrs. Baltimore. Those diamonds, those manners! Putting her hand on your cousin's shoulder, calling him 'Jack' before us all. And then the style, the nature of her stories. Pray, what did you think of Mr. Chamberlayne's comments upon the nice little scandal about the Lyttons?"

"I thought Jack spoke like what he is—a fool," answers Mr. Roberts, laconically. "The man's tone, if not his actual speech, fell scarcely short of an innuendo against his own wife."

"Ah," says Hetty, with mournful resignation, "you must remember we do not know all. Poor, unfortunate young man! We do not know all."

"Poor, unfortunate young woman, you might rather say," returns Mr. Roberts. "If it were possible for you, once in your life, to feel compassion for any member of your own sex, Hetty, you might well pity the wife of Jack Chamberlayne. You remarked, a moment ago, that her spirits were forced. Add something more. Say that there is the look of a broken heart on that girl's face already!"

"I pity no willing victims," cries Hetty, coldly. "When I see misery fall on persons who desecrate the *finest feelings* of

human nature by making a mercenary marriage, I say, 'Amen.' They have deserved it."

Mr. Robarts is silent. It may be that this little commination has thrust home with truer aim, bitterer emphasis, than Hetty herself suspects.

Meanwhile the departed guests undergo lively vivisection at the hands of the friends left behind in Piccadilly,

"Thank heaven, we can breathe once more!" cries Bell, jumping up and adjusting her opera cloak before a glass. "When next I go to an improving lecture, I shall sympathise with the unfortunate frogs under the air-pump. Hetty is a person who exhausts all the moral oxygen out of the atmosphere."

"I admire Mrs. Robarts immensely," says Lord Stair, in his gravest voice. "Mrs. Robarts has taught me a great deal about Egyptian potteries, and I am asked to an æsthetic tea at her house on Wednesday week. Mrs. Baltimore, I hope I am to have the pleasure of meeting you?"

"At the æsthetic tea? Why, did you not see—Hetty cut me dead before she left! Jack, my dear boy, don't introduce me to your relations another time until you have clearly ascertained whether they desire to know me or not. If the game had only been worth the candle"—Bell puts her blonde head on one side, and looks pensive—"if the game had only been worth playing, I would have made friends with Mr. Robarts, for Hetty's punishment! Whenever a man says 'My dear' to his wife in the kind of tone he says it to Hetty, I feel sure he is a poor creature whom five minutes' temptation would bring to the gallows."

"And he was a rattling good fellow, too, before marriage

spoil him, as it does the rest of us," remarks Jack. Wiser people, when they have drawn a blank in the great lottery, abstain, as a rule, from railing against the lottery system in general. Poor, stupid, straightforward Jack never loses a chance of having a fling at marriage and the unhappiness of married men. "When I was a youngster, coming up from school, there was not a better fellow going than Charlie Robarts. Great hand at theatrical matters; knew what was going on in every theatre in town—why, and wrote a play himself, though I can't say it had much of a run! And fond of a jolly game of loo—yes, and a hard drinker, too." Jack shakes his head despondently as he thinks of the fine qualities that time and marriage have spoiled in his cousin's disposition. "And now, when he is home from work, Hetty sends him out to mind the children. I have seen him often, of a Sunday morning, in Kensington Gardens, with the nursemaids and perambulators."

"In the present state of society, perambulators appear to be the final cause of the hardworking barrister," cries Bell, with her little decisive air of flippant irony. "Lord Stair, you are going to hear Nilsson to-night? No. Then, Jack, I have no choice left me but to run away with you. Oh, I know you are not in evening dress, but you can see me as far as the door of the opera-house, at least. It will not take you out of your way."

And Jack has to obey with as good a grace as he can command. He likes Mrs. Baltimore better than most people: he likes loo and lansquenet better than Mrs. Baltimore; and the opera-house does not lie on the direct road between Piccadilly and St. James's Street.

So Lord Stair and his hostess are left alone.

"Talking of final causes—if one could only discover the final causes of a Bell Baltimore!" remarks Lord Stair.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE MOON, SO-CALLED, OF HONEY.

To some human creatures folly means pleasure; "the more they drink of the world the more it intoxicateth." To others folly is education; perilous, but necessary. Jack Chamberlayne belongs to the class of men who turn day into night, frequent music-halls, drink, smoke, beggar themselves over the card-table from habit; hating the fatal routine as no hired labourer ever hated his day's work, however nauseous. A perfectly hopeless class, aware, themselves, of their own hopelessness.

"Turn over a new leaf!" thus Jack will answer friend or physician who attempts to reason with him. "Drink a cup of water-gruel and to bed at ten, and for what? I don't care a straw whether I live or die—the pace which finishes me soonest will suit my book best. The duty I owe to others? As long as I contrive to live till my next birthday, and keep well out of the way meanwhile, 'others' will not complain, depend upon it."

And yet, when he and Leah drove away from Madame Bonchrétien's door on that October evening we know of, the germs of better resolves were in Jack Chamberlayne's breast. Mentally and physically, never was man of five-and-twenty more irreclaimably lost than he; and still, in the very depths

of Jack's moral nature there were places that the cankerworm had not touched—greener places than many a so-called healthy organization can boast. He forsook his bride of an hour to run after Rose the chambermaid, prompted by the same school-boy spirit in which, had occasion permitted, he would have hiccupped forth the "Ten Little Niggers" at the wedding feast. Before half the hymeneal moon had waned, he had transgressed every limit of good taste and sober sense. But in his heart—Jack Chamberlayne's weed-choked heart!—was honest love for his wife, determination, just as sincere as though he had been the possessor of virtues and ability, to make her happy.

If Leah could have dissembled better—she who in all life's graceful trivialities dissembled to such nice perfection! Alas, to feign affection at every hour of the twenty-four; to find talk, Bell Baltimore's style of talk, for a companion, brainless even in the intervals when what intelligence he had was not over-clouded by wine; to sympathize, or seem to sympathize, with his interests; to think down to the level of his thoughts:—*this* was beyond her strength!

Had she never met Danton, never woke through love to remorse, she might possibly have laboured with less self-reproachful earnestness to sustain the burthen of her new duties, and while she laboured less have succeeded better. As it was, they had not been married a week before Jack, with all his dulness, began to discern that every hour, every minute of Leah's existence was a piece of studied, albeit conscientious, acting. He had known her, in the days of their engagement, changeable, petulant, imperious—bewitching always; and was prepared for the same kind of qualities in her as a wife. These he could have comprehended. Leah Pascal, with her power of

alternate torture and fascination, was, at least, a flesh-and-blood angel, set apart (if set apart at all) by a line too delicate for his discernment from the angels of his own past experience. Of Leah Chamberlayne—gentle, patient, icily submissive to his smallest whim or wish—Jack understood no more than he did of any stone goddess in the galleries through which, yawning and martyred, he found himself forced to loiter during the first miserable weeks of his marriage.

What was it that set the Leah he had won so irreconcilably at odds with the Leah he had courted? Did the fault lie in himself? Jack had graduated long before in the school of cheap, Saturday cynicism; knew the stock maxims by heart about woman, her master, and the curiously tonic qualities of neglect, when exhibited by husbands. So he tried the experiment of neglect! And after leaving his bride alone for half a day or more, would find her, on his return, gentle, patient, submissive, as was her habit, with a look sometimes about the eyelids that told of tears, and occasionally so far oblivious of her duty as never to inquire what had kept her lord from her side so long. Had she had some old love affair of which he knew not? Difficult even for jealousy to credit that Leah Pascal, as Jack first saw her at Scarborough under the wing of Mrs. Baltimore, could have been a victim to romantic sentiment in any shape. But since—had that flirtation with Lord Stair in Paris left a deeper mark upon her memory than she would have him think?

Mr. Chamberlayne busied himself over this last idea, magnified remembered trifles, coined others, with as much consistency, as varied powers of self-torture, as though he had been a man of the finest order of intellect. At length enlightenment blazed upon him suddenly, and with such concentrated force as to

shrivel up doubt, uncertainty—alas, and with them his last lingering belief in Leah for evermore !

It was one blue spring midday in Rome. Their life, I should say, had taken a somewhat better turn since they arrived in Rome. English beer could be had in the Eternal City, and rats ; and a special turn of fortune had thrown Jack across an old school friend possessing congenial tastes—and terriers. Resources like these at least robbed Mr. Chamberlayne's days of the hideous monotony that had crushed him at the Italian lakes and in Florence, while at the same time they brought something like liberty to his wife. If ruins and picture-galleries yielded her pleasure, in Heaven's name let her make the most of it—with a hired cicerone. Jack, for one, was never going to pretend a love for antiquities and such "bosh" again ! And with a sense of healthier interest than she had taken in anything since her marriage, Leah ere long began to avail herself of this grudgingly accorded freedom.

She was too profoundly unread, thanks to Colonel Pascal's system of female education, to derive the keen delight born of association from what she saw. But to a bruised spirit, with or without the higher help of knowledge, the mere breathing of Roman air is medicine. Laocoon's torture, the Gladiator's death-swoon, bore scarcely more significance to Leah than the biscuit shepherdesses or painted fans of a Parisian toy-stall. The subtle poetry of external Rome—its magnificence and meanness, its noble breathing past, its sordid, pulseless present, touched her only remotely. And still, day by day, she felt that her pain lessened, that the imperfections of her own span of existence became vague and unsubstantial in the presence of all these centuries whose footprints lay around her. During her life's one hour of poetry, under the chestnuts in the Tuileries,

Danton had spoken of Rome, and of how one day they would wander amidst its marvels together. And in this remembrance, unacknowledged, possibly, by herself, there was another source of semi-bitter balm. If she had had the strength to accept him and poverty, they might have been standing now under this Italian sky, arm clasped in arm, heart answering to heart, intelligence to intelligence. For she *would* have risen—vain dream of every woman who has made a mistaken marriage—she *would* have risen, through the force of affection alone, to the level of the man she loved ; would have seen through his eyes, thought through his thoughts, sufficiently at least, to learn, and so yield him the sweets of perfect companionship.

The pathetic contrast of her actual loneliness, a hired cicerone, or "Bradshaw," for her guide, her husband elsewhere engaged with beer and terriers, would bring a choking sensation in Leah's breast—tears, unbidden, to her eyes. Still, the pain, the tears, were healing ones. The moment that regret can become associated with some new source of wholesome daily pleasure, we have advanced one stage upon the road to consolation. Leah grew to look forward to each fresh morning's occupation ; Mr Chamberlayne continued to kill time and rats, quiescent, if not amused. And then came the unhappy accident that upset everything. Returning unexpectedly to their lodging in the Piazza di Spagna, one blue spring mid-day, Jack found his wife alone, weeping passionately, an open letter between her hands.

To dull, furtive tear-shedding, or rather to the tell-tale signs of such, Jack had grown tolerably hardened. This was the first time in his married experience that he had witnessed any outburst of a demonstrative or open kind from Leah ; and he insisted—had he not the right ?—upon knowing what was the

meaning of it. From whom was the letter? What! had it got to this already—that she carried on a clandestine correspondence, received letters unknown to him, without his sanction! Jack's lips grew white with anger, as he stood, prophetically conscious, perhaps, of the kind of revelation that was approaching.

Coldly, articulately, came Leah's answer to her husband; a spot like fire starting on each pale cheek as she spoke. Her correspondent was no clandestine one, but her own sister. Oh! if he doubted, let him look—at *that* distance, no nearer—at the big child's text in which Deb's envelope was directed.

"And a letter from your sister has had the effect of upsetting you like this?" demanded Jack. "A letter, without enclosure, from little Deb?"

"Most undoubtedly," was Leah's reply. "Surely, so much of liberty may be left to me. I may receive what letters from the children I choose, and shed tears over them, or not, at my pleasure."

And then she first came to see of what materials, truly, her lord and master was made. Setting himself straight before her, his weak face distorted by passion, such as I believe only these weak faces can wear, Jack, with a great oath, demanded that the letter should be given into his hands. Family affection—love for her little sisters! Let that story be told to some one else, not him. He had had too many samples already of the affections of the Pascal family! *He* knew them, from the father downwards! Cry over the dear children's letters? Leah had been willing enough to get away from the dear children at any price, and with no tear-shedding at all. He would find her weeping next over one of her papa's begging letters—those touching appeals in the shape of unpaid milliners' bills with which

Colonel Pascal (alas ! this was but too true) was beginning to pursue them on their wedding tour—with more of a like nature. It was the first time Jack had found an opportunity of thoroughly relieving his mind since his marriage ; and you may be sure he told his bride a great many more truths than I should think it pleasant or edifying to record.

Well, and when he had quite finished, Leah answered him, courteously, quietly—when are the deeply-stricken loud ? There was justice in much that Jack had said. Of all women living, she was the last to be free of self-reproach, and it was her intention, her hope, to fulfil her duty as a wife to the uttermost, and he should *not* see that letter ! No, by the heaven that made them both, he should not ! The right to correspond with her own family, at her own pleasure, was hers, and he should respect it.

Little was she prepared for the storm that followed. Colonel Pascal, in his worst altercations with his daughters, was never a violent man. Bitter, sarcastic, mean—these things, under provocation, could the Prince Charming be. Outwardly, he remained a gentleman, always ; kept his language under command as perfect as he kept his feelings. Jack Chamberlayne had no more self-control than has a froward, reasonless child. What, in truth, was he but a froward, reasonless child !

“Right !” he exclaimed vehemently. “You talk in this fine strain of right to me—when you owe me *everything* ! You, yes, and your father, and sisters as well. A set of paupers all round ! But we shall soon see who is to be master of us two !”

And thus speaking, and ere she could sufficiently divine the meditated treachery to guard against it, he had snatched the letter by force out of his wife's hand. “Read it, then,” cried Leah, with bloodless lips, a glitter that boded no good coming in

her eyes. "You will not be much the wiser or the happier, afterwards—but that is your concern, not mine. Read it, and bear the consequences!"

And Jack obeyed her.

Clearly, ineffaceably, did every smallest detail of that scene and moment engrave itself on Leah's brain. The bare, vaulted room, with the patch of sapphire showing through the open case-ment; the immense seven-storied, yellow-washed palaces across the Piazza; the chattering of busy Roman tongues from the thoroughfare beneath; yes—even to the song that a caged bird was pouring forth on the blue air from a window above—she remembered all!

"My dear, dear, old Leah." This was Deb's letter, written in straggling round-hand, with precarious punctuation and arbitrary capitals. "I am glad that you like roam, and jack's cough is better, what fun for him to have ratcatching. Only I am sorry for the Rats, and I should like to see sanpetres. Naomi has got a new spring dress and I am to have her old one full of wholes and Greese. I wish you had never married jack, for if you had married M. Danton you might have taken me away from papa at wonce. I go in his room very often, and he sings the songs he sung That sunday, and I gave him your Foto. And he looks ill. And madame says M. Danton has never been the same man since Miss Leah married, and Désiré has grown so big out of his jackets madame says she must have a New Boy. My dear, dear Leah, I shall like to stay with you in London, and have a riding-habbit made by the tayler, and I have had one of my *worse attacks*. And Danton nursed me like you, and so no more from your loving little sister, d. Pascal."

"My love to jack he has come in with some Violettes and I send 2 or 3 and he hopes you are happy. From Deb."

Twice Jack Chamberlayne read the letter through, searching at every word for his rival, Lord Stair's, name, and finding nothing. He read it a third time before the truth—the disgraceful, damning truth, so he held it—broke upon his slow intelligence. Leah, his wife, had loved, not Lord Stair, but this man Danton!—a foreigner, a penniless medical student, a musician!

Fury, horrible to behold, distorted poor Jack's face. He tore the letter into shreds; he ground it, and the violets, under his heel—danced upon them. Then, his first passion a little spent, he came up, threateningly close, to Leah's side.

"And so that was your secret, was it, Lord Stair the blind? You, a girl decently brought up, the daughter of a man calling himself a gentleman, you carried on a love-intrigue with that scoundrel Danton, at the time you were engaged to me, at the time you and your father were rifling my pockets—eh?"

No answer to this. Leah just stood passive, stony; ready to receive his insults, or, if it should please him better so to vent his sense of injury, his blows.

"Swear on your oath," cried Jack, transported beyond every bound of reason by the suddenness of the discovery that had come upon him—"Swear on your oath that you never loved this man, never encouraged his intentions, unless you want me to kill you as you stand there!"

"I will swear no oath at all," was Leah's reply. "And don't let us have any nonsense about 'killing,' please. Nothing of that kind ever affects my nerves. What good is life to me? What happiness have I in life? People seldom gain by dishonourable actions, I begin to see—one can learn so much in a few short months or weeks! Well, and you have not profited by reading a letter you had no right to read. The thing is over."

"Over! By the Lord!" exclaimed Jack Chamberlayne, his

face drawn and white with rage ; " I don't know what you mean by over ! I call it just begun. You refuse to swear ? I give you one chance more."

" Most certainly I refuse. You read a letter which it was an act of dishonesty in you to read. Interpret its contents in any way you choose—but without help from me. I have perjured myself enough already for one lifetime."

" And loving him, encouraging him—ay, for I can see it all now—' the songs he sung that Sunday ;' I remember another song he sung upon your wedding-day—you felt no shame, oh my God !" cried poor Jack with trembling lips, " no shame, no remorse, in marrying me ?"

" If I did not," answered Leah, her head-drooping upon her breast, " I shall find shame and remorse enough for the remainder of my life, be quite sure."

So the scene came to an end, barring some ugly last words of Jack's that do not need setting down. And Leah found herself alone again, blankly gazing from her window at the sapphire sky and yellow-washed palaces, and broad steps leading upward from the Piazza to the brow of the Pincian Hill.

Long did she stand thus : tearless, white, still,—stupefied, one who watched her might have said, rather than undergoing any acute or passionate pain. Then, in a mechanical sort of way, she stooped, picked up the fragments of little Deb's letter, and the violets that Mr. Chamberlayne's dishonouring heel had ground into shreds. Every smallest object reminding her of Danton—his one letter, of six words, the withered Gloire de Dijon roses—Leah, since her marriage, had conscientiously destroyed. But these few torn violet petals she hid away ; can never look at now (nay, can scarce smell violets in the street) without all that morning's scene, the vaulted Roman room, the

snatch of glowing sky, the song of the wild-bird from his prison, coming back upon her mind !

Well, and after this—after this, I am far from saying that Leah made no more efforts along the dreary uphill path of duty. What was her whole life save one dread effort ? But she left off being patient, and it was better so. That virtue of absolute patience is at all times too nearly akin to despair for moral health. When Mr. Chamberlayne would heap his miserable insults upon her, or rather upon Danton—his wife's secret discovered, and Jack seemed never to weary of this employment—she got into the habit of answering him, with few words well chosen ; words tacitly admitting the justice of his reproaches, and that stabbed Jack's ruined heart like a knife. After a time she began to amuse herself ; to appear on the Corso, or in the Pincian gardens, at fashionable hours ; regained an interest, dead since her marriage, in millinery ; made acquaintance with the crowd of English, from whom hitherto she had held coldly aloof ; by-and-by, picnicked on the Campagna, saw the Coliseum by moonlight, visited the ateliers, and danced at the Quirinal with the rest—had two or three devoted admirers, even, Roman and English ; can a fair woman exist without admiration any more than she can exist without a shadow ?

At all this Jack looked on, sullen, morose—jealous (of any man nearer than the Rue Castiglione) never ! His instincts, unalloyed by reason, were on some points correct as a child's. Knowing the one bare, intolerable truth as he knew it, no smaller doubt or suspicion could have place in his mind. The Anglo-Roman world might whisper this thing or that of Mrs. Chamberlayne ; her admirers might hope, despair, hope again, by turns. Jack, with his narrow vision, his dull weak brain, knew better than them all. Leah might dance, dress, conquer

as she chose, and her husband stood by—more frequently did not stand by—with the same apathetic indifference to her actions. What need for a husband to watch a wife whose heart was sentinelled like Leah's ! What mattered her heart to him ! What mattered anything, save to drink the dregs of his own poisoned life with as much haste as possible—make the most of all opportunity for self-forgetfulness that might come to his hand !

They left Rome in April. They visited Monaco. You have heard Jack speak of Monaco, and of Leah's newly-developed faculty for gambling. And then came their journey home to London, where ruin made easy lay pleasantly open for either of them, or both. The world, ever ready with its gift of prophecy, thought for *both*. The season of their return was May ; a blue sky, or such pale smoke-hue as in England is accounted blue, overhead ; the trees clean ; the east wind searching men's lungs and tempers ; the sparrows chirping out their hopes, and seeing to their nests on the house-tops. What kind of nest should this pair of newly-matched love-birds inhabit ?

Lord Stair's practical advice helped them in this, as in most things—by good chance, as regarded Leah's visiting list, a favourable turn in his lordship's money matters gave him the prospect of spending the summer in London. Lord Stair met the pilgrims on the platform at Victoria ; dined with them ; that very evening, Jack, too wearied to stir out after the journey, escorted Leah to the Opera, where all the world was hearing Patti's first song of the season. By the end of a week he had installed them in their hotel, put Jack in the way of losing any amount of money he chose, in good company—there is the advantage of having a man of rank for your friend !—and caused at least six ladies of quality, if not of character, to leave

their cards with the hall-porter at Mr. and Mrs. Chamberlayne's hotel. By the end of a fortnight, Leah began to "float." The name of the new beauty was already a familiar word upon the lips of idle London; and the name of the new beauty was seldom spoken in club, park, or ball-room, unaccompanied by that of Lord Stair. The programme chalked out by Milor eight months before in Paris so far working to admiration.

To float! With a husband sullenly acquiescent like Jack, with a friend as much in earnest and as powerful as Lord Stair, what should Leah do but float along the rapids of folly on which she had embarked? During the first months of her marriage the newness of her pain had been sufficient to occupy her. She was *accustomed* to everything now; to Jack, and Jack's violence, and her own self-loathing, and the constant weight upon the heart—the days that dread the morrow, the blank awakening to each new morning of a loveless, emasculated life. Ah! Heaven, one must have excitement when it comes to this: drug memory, slay regret, by whatever means come readiest! Surely, in this all-whirling, all-forgetting London, there can be no space for the ghosts that haunt her with such stubborn pertinacity. That starlit walk in the garden of the Tuileries, that farewell hour in the atelier . . . absurd to think such memories cannot be lived down! Why, look at half the women of good position that one meets—women well contented with the day's labour and day's wages of their life! Look at the faces, "beautiful with plast'ring art," that smile on you from gay equipages in the Park and Row. Were these, do you suppose, never tear-stained, never pale with remorse over some girlish love, whose murder was necessary before gay equipages and good position could be attained at all?

Float along the rapids; every day faster. So things have

gone on for a fair number of weeks now. Ball-going men fight for Mrs. Chamberlayne's round dances ; ball-givers (without daughters, especially) are eager to secure her for their entertainments. At the Derby, Hurlingham, the four-in-hand meetings in Hyde Park—wherever she appears—Mrs. Chamberlayne is pronounced the prettiest woman present. More than once she has waltzed with royalty ; if Fate prove propitious, may even be seen at the great Duchess of St. Ives' approaching ball, through Lord Stair's influence. And still memory refuses to be drugged, and regret dies not.

"Something wrong in the digestion, depend upon it," said Bell Baltimore, when Leah once whispered a hint of her soul's sickness to her friend. "You want tonics. Centuries ago, I, too, had my attack of Wertherism, as you know . . . well, and nothing saved my complexion but arsenic, in tiny doses."

"I think arsenic in large doses would be a far surer cure for my complaint," was Leah's answer.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A TAME CAT.

"If one could discover the final cause of a Bell Baltimore."

So speaks Lord Stair, when Bell, in her sweep of vanity, the dusky effulgence of her black lace and diamonds, has floated away out of the room on her host's not-too-ready arm.

"Final causes are quite beyond the range of my intellect," answers Leah. "Bell's present effect is the delightful one of amusing unamusable people, Jack especially. The god-send she was at dinner ! How could we have supported three mortal

hours of Hetty and Hetty's husband, without Bell's little stories to keep us all awake?"

"The little story of Tom Lytton and his wife, for example. Apropos — no, *not* apropos of Tom Lytton and his wife," says Lord Stair, taking up his crush-hat, but showing no other signs of departure, "I have heard some news that you and Jack will be interested in, Mrs. Chamberlayne. I quite forgot to tell you about it sooner."

"My prophetic soul forewarns me—the Duchess of St. Ives!" cries Leah. "The Duchess of St. Ives and her daughter will have nothing to do with such obscure persons as Mr. and Mrs. Chamberlayne, but Lord Stair has not moral courage sufficient to say no. Never mind our feelings," she adds, lightly. "Æsthetic Bayswater teas are safer entertainments, no doubt, than ducal balls, if we could only be content with them."

"The Duchess of St. Ives will act precisely as her friends bid her," answers Lord Stair. "As to Lady Violet—you are right; Lady Violet would gladly have nothing to do with any woman younger and prettier than herself! You have promised to be at the Zoo to-morrow, recollect. Well, and *I* promise that to-morrow you shall get your invitation, from the Duchess's own lips, if you will. No; my news, such as it is, concerns some one whom we all know and like in Paris."

"You mean Naomi, of course?" Admirably does Leah control her voice, bravely do her eyes meet the tyrant eyes that watch her: yet at the word "Paris," spoken just at this moment by Lord Stair, her heart gives a throb of sudden terror, and he perceives it. Until a woman hardens into a daughter of marble—a veritable Bell Baltimore—there is generally some fluttering bit of lace, or tell-tale trembling end of ribbon, that will betray her secrets. "I had a letter from the Rue Castiglione last week,

brimful of exciting intelligence. Papa was actually going to take the poor child to her first ball at the Embassy, and——”

“And I,” says Lord Stair, in his calm voice, “had a letter from the Rue Castiglione last night—the familiar theme, some of those little bills I forgot to pay before I left Paris—and in this letter I hear——”

“Something tremendously important, I am sure, to require so much circumlocution !”

“That our friend, M. Danton, is coming—stay ! has come, I fancy—to live in London for good. He has got an appointment as out-surgeon at Guy’s or Bartholomew’s, I am such a terrible fellow for forgetting details.”

Lord Stair, it may be remarked, was never known to forget a detail (or forgive a slight) in his life.

“What a fortunate move for him !” And still there is no outward change in Leah’s voice. “With his abilities—there is no doubt he was half a genius !—M. Danton always seemed to me a round peg in a square hole at Madame Bonchrétien’s. Afterwards ? What is the news Jack and I are to be so deeply interested in ?”

“Oh, nothing—nothing more.” Lord Stair glances up at the ceiling ; takes his crush-hat again between his hands, inspects its quality, then returns it to its place under his arm. “That was a fiery diatribe of Jack’s against old loves, was it not ?” he goes on presently. “I never knew before, Leah, that your husband had so much of the hidden Othello in his composition.”

“And, as Bell told him, high tragedy is not a line in which Jack would be likely to reap laurels. Now, if it were only you, Lord Stair, it would be different. There are dark unfathomable parts—Wicked Noblemen in melodrama, and the like—that would suit your talents to a nicety.”

Leah, until now, has been standing at some little distance from Lord Stair. As she speaks, she turns ; and, coming nearer to his side, looks up, with a smile such as might almost lose another Troy, into his face. Does that smile betoken coquetry, encouragement, *fear*? To the understanding of feminine human nature, Lord Stair has devoted his forty years of life, not unsuccessfully. And still does the nature of this particular woman remain to him a Sphinx. With Leah Pascal, the girl, he was at no time certain upon what ground he stood. With Leah Chamberlayne, the woman of the world, he is uncertain as to whether he stands on any ground at all. She never slights him by word or action ; never avoids being alone with him ; in a ball-room will reject younger men, by the dozen, to accept his attention—nay, avows, openly, that she enjoys his lordship's Mephistophelian criticisms on her friends better than a waltz with the best partner in London. But in her heart—I use the term hesitatingly ; Lord Stair does not believe in hearts—what does Leah feel towards the man who holds her, with such cruel certitude, in his power ?

“ If Jack, instead of the good little lad he is, were the blackest Othello breathing, I, for one, should not be disposed to judge him too harshly. Iago talks, does he not, of ‘ a fellow almost damned in a fair wife.’ Well, and I can understand that kind of Hades ! I can understand the tortures I should undergo, myself, under such circumstances.”

Leah laughs pleasantly.

“ I tell Jack sometimes, that he might pay me the compliment of showing a little deeper concern in my comings and goings than he does, but in vain. You cannot awaken people to a sense of responsibility against their will. Once upon a time, at Madame Bonchrétien's, I would not solemnly declare that Jack was not

so much—you see?—just so much, *jealous*.” Speaking the word in a whisper, and indicating the fraction of an inch upon one slender finger. “And then suddenly, on a certain fine morning in Rome, if I remember right, I discovered that he had come to his right mind.”

“As regards the jealousy, or the object of the jealousy, Mrs. Chamberlayne?”

“Really, Lord Stair, that question, like your remark about final causes, is beyond me.” But, do what she will, Leah cannot keep a flush of crimson from staining her cheek at his tone. “‘Jealousy, or the object of the jealousy!’ All these high falutin’ emotions are so utterly out of my way of life, that I never even trouble my head to think of them. . . Ah, you delicious little morsels!” she breaks off, inclining her face towards the bouquet in Lord Stair’s button-hole. “If lilies of the valley were only unattainable, how frantic we should all be about their possession!”

“I don’t believe in the word ‘unattainable,’” says Lord Stair, speaking below his breath, and looking exceedingly hot and in earnest. “Even as regards the heart of the veriest coquette breathing, I believe—oh, Mrs. Chamberlayne, it would be affectation for you to attempt to misunderstand me any longer. My whole existence is consumed by one thought!” Lord Stair’s weight is a solid, rapidly increasing fourteen stone. “Sleeping or waking, one image pursues me—you know too well whose image that is!”

And before Leah can foresee or thwart his intention, he has caught her hand in his, has lifted it, half-way to his lips.

Half-way, only. Leah does not attempt to retreat from him; she feigns neither surprise nor indignation; she simply utters the monosyllable “Oh!” And Lord Stair relinquishes his hold,

and at the same time feels more intensely foolish than he was ever made to feel by any utterance of woman's tongue yet.

"Oh, this is amusing, I must say—better comedy than they give us at the theatres. You and I, Lord Stair and Leah Chamberlayne, *at our time of life*, to begin playing at sentimentalities!"

And she laughs, one of those quiet, semi-bitter laughs before which a man's capabilities for saying pretty things shrivel up like a scroll of parchment before the fire.

"Fortunate, at least, that I have it in my power to divert you, Mrs. Chamberlayne! I was not aware that anything I said would appear so superlatively ridiculous in your sight."

"Ridiculous to the last point of absurdity, and at the same time, painful. Three words dispose of such a matter with most people. To you I don't want to say those three words—for I like you! I like you," repeats Leah, in that pretty, pleading voice of hers, "and I am grateful."

"Grateful!"

"Exceedingly. But for you, what would have become of me in this great Babylon? Jack's acquaintance are very nice acquaintance, no doubt, for the world they belong to; and on my side I have just got poor Bell Baltimore, who belongs to no world at all! Look what you have done for us!" By a graceful little sweep of the hand she indicates a table filled to overflowing with cards and notes. "Every day a new caller, every day a new invitation for Mr. and Mrs. Chamberlayne, and through whose thoughtfulness, whose goodness? Why, Lord Stair, we should be the very most ungrateful people living, Jack and I, if we were not profoundly sensible of all we owe to you."

But neither pleading tones nor graceful gestures can blind Lord Stair to the all-galling fact that Leah Chamberlayne, the little roturière whom he has helped so far along the road to

popularity, readily appreciative though she may be of his favours, does, in her inmost soul, laugh at and make light of, him.

"If you were less grateful, and at the same time less cold, Mrs. Chamberlayne, I should feel myself infinitely better repaid!"

"Cold! And what would you have me be but cold?" she exclaims, her bantering manner changing in a moment to one of gravity. "You know, as well as most people, what our life is—poor Jack's and mine. How can a woman be otherwise than cold who has to tread such a path as I tread? Why, there is my best chance of happiness, you yourself have said so a dozen times. With a heart, an imitation, even, of a heart, I might lose courage altogether. As I am——"

"As you are," interrupts Lord Stair, with well dissembled spontaneity, "thrown away—nay, Leah, for once, I insist upon your listening to me—unvalued, where you should be valued most, and with an intelligence that bonnets and bracelets cannot satisfy—placed in such a position as yours, is the devotion of the one person who adores you a subject altogether for ridicule, do you think?"

"If by devotion you mean honest, commonplace friendship——"

"I mean worship, true and tender, as ever man offered to woman. You know it."

"And commonplace friendship is just the only feeling that can touch me. 'Worship, true and tender,' why, it is like a line of poetry, and I *hate* poetry! I can't even listen to such nonsense-talk as you seem in the mood for to-night."

She moves a step away from him, folds her white arms steadily across each other, and so stands: an expression whose

chill blank sincerity Lord Stair is far too acute a judge to misinterpret, upon her face.

That expression fires him out of all his habitual self-command.

"And yet, Mrs. Chamberlayne, you were not so impenetrable to softer feeling once! On the night that I saw you at the *Café Chantant* in Paris—you wore a dress I had a weakness for, I recollect, black, covered over with shining golden spots—on that night, as you stood, your hand within M. Danton's arm, the lamps shining on your face, I thought if ever there was a face that could make a man's heaven on earth through its tenderness, it was Leah Pascal's."

For a moment every hue of life vanishes from Leah's cheek, her hands droop, cold and nerveless, her breath grows thick. Then the forlorn courage of the helpless comes to her—such courage as the dove shows when she pecks the falcon's talons!

"I have wondered—a good many times—whether you really did recognise me that evening. Deb had been sick during the day, and M. Danton was kind enough to take me out for an hour's fresh air in the *Champs Elysées*. You must have walked home to the *Rue Castiglione* pretty quick," she adds—all this in an abrupt, staccato sort of way, without pause or hesitation;—"for by the time I got back you were in the salon, drinking Madame's Sunday punch, with the old ladies, do you remember, ready to bid me welcome!"

"And from that hour to this have displayed—have I not?—the modest virtue of discretion, at least. Give me credit for the small amount of good there is in me."

"Small amount! Why, I give you credit for every virtue under the sun," she cries. Oh, that Lord Stair could read aright her tone, her glance! "Discretion is but a negative

quality. I give you credit for *all* the fine and delicate feelings that should make an honourable man regard another's secret, however it came into his possession, as something sacred."

For a second, a second only, Lord Stair winces. Then—"Secret!" he repeats quietly, "was there ever any secret in the matter? Some of the other people were with you, surely? Naomi, and Mrs. Tomson——"

"M. Danton and I were alone."

"Really? I could almost have sworn to seeing Mrs. Tomson and Naomi—but my wretched memory so often plays me traitor! Supposing a totally different case," he goes on, watching her narrowly. "Supposing—I talk nonsense, I know—that I indeed possessed a secret affecting your happiness, more than your happiness, do you not feel that it would be safe as the grave in my keeping?"

"I—I don't exactly see how it should be to your interest to injure me," says Leah, her eyes sinking beneath his, the colour returning to her cheek.

"Even after such cruelty as you have treated me with to-night? Ah, well, Mrs. Chamberlayne, the first smart of pain is over, and I have learned my lesson! For the future I shall know the exact light in which you regard me—out of 'gratitude.' A harmless old square-toes, good to hold your fan and bouquet while you give away his dances to younger men, a convenient chaperon for Hurlingham or the theatres in Jack's absence—a tame cat, in short, with claws well sheathed——"

"With claws always ready to make their venom felt, Milor," interrupts Leah. When they are on the friendliest terms she calls him Milor sometimes, in remembrance of old Paris days, and Lord Stair, you may be sure, accepts the flag of truce that the familiar name holds forth. "Claim any other resemblance

to the tame cat that you like—not that one. Your claws are never really sheathed, even in jest.”

“And you will not give me the poor pleasure of saying that you believe in my fidelity? If an occasion arose when it lay in my power to stand between you and harm——”

“So much depends upon what one means by harm, Milor!”

“I mean, at this moment, loss of honour,” he answers with grave emphasis. “Not, as you know well, of honour itself, but of good name, the counter that passes current for the genuine coin in the world, and whose loss to most of us, alas! is of greater importance than that of the genuine coin itself.”

“Well, if such an emergency should arise,” begins Leah solemnly.

“If such an emergency should arise,” he whispers.

“I would rather my salvation depended upon myself than upon the fidelity, ‘true and tender,’ of any living man! That is all. Do you know, Lord Stair, that it is past eleven o’clock, and that I have to elbow my way through old Lady Wallace’s crush, and afterwards be seen at these new cotton people’s ball of inauguration, before my Saturday night’s work is done?”

“In other words—I am dismissed,” says Lord Stair. “After all our attempts at quarrelling, Leah, we part friends? You will keep one dance vacant for me at Lady Wallace’s?”

“And as many as you like at the cotton people’s—of course. on our usual condition of not dancing them.”

But Lord Stair, and a good many younger men than Lord Stair, are doomed to disappointment. Neither at Lady Wallace’s crush, nor at the cotton people’s inauguration ball, is the fair face of Leah Chamberlayne seen to-night.

CHAPTER XXV.

"I DARE MOST THINGS."

THE June day-dawn has already begun to break over Green Park by the time that Mr. Chamberlayne returns to his hotel. The driver of his hansom, not unused to performing this office for gentlemen of pleasure towards the small hours, fits the latch-key into the lock for him, and after a good deal of difficulty, a great many mistaken aims, Jack succeeds in lighting a candle at the feeble jet of gas left burning in the hall.

A gentleman of pleasure—*pleasure!* Look at the lad's wan, vacant face, and abstain from ever using that word again, in connection with a life like his. The morning light glances in upon him, cold and ghastly, as, quarrelling with the bannister and the wall alternately, he makes his way upstairs; it falls full upon Leah, who stands at an open door upon the first landing, dressed in her dinner dress as when Jack saw her last, ready to receive him.

"You up still!" he exclaims, suddenly sobered by the unexpectedness of the apparition; for you may believe that burning the wifely rushlight of expectation is not one of Leah's habits. "Why what the — does this mean?"

Mr. Chamberlayne's expletives are unwriteable; yet must they occasionally be indicated, if one would do justice to the masculine vigour of his domestic small talk. "I have a word or two to say to you," answers Leah, quietly, "and as I was not sleepy, I thought I might as well get them over to-night—or rather this morning. Would you mind coming into the drawing-room?"

Her face has the look about it that Jack dreads, the look it wore at the moment when he ground Danton's violets beneath his heel, and he shrinks, with not unnatural distaste, from the proffered "word or two." Between any husband and any wife explanations at three in the morning, the wife heavy-eyed from watching, the husband, latch-key in hand, could scarcely be reckoned among the genial duties of life. The dim religious light, whether of taper or day-dawn; the ghostly outside silence; the sense of separation between yon two, waking and at war, and the whole big, peaceful, sleeping world—these are influences before which the courage of stronger men than Jack Chamberlayne has been known to wax faint.

"I am sure I can't see," he begins, peevishly, "why everything could not as well be said at breakfast—if there is anything to say."

"Only that we never breakfast together," answers Leah, in her clear voice; "and that to-morrow, to-day rather, being Sunday, I shall probably have started for church about an hour-and-a-half before your eyes are open."

"Ah, I forgot that—church. By —, to think of the hypocrisy of women! Church—and such a life as ours!"

However, he turns away from the direction of his own apartment, and, with exceeding ill-grace, enters the drawing-room.

"Let the curtain-lecture be short, Mrs. Chamberlayne," blowing out his candle as he speaks. "It is broad daylight already, and I am by no means in a humour for scenes."

"Curtain-lecture!" She closes the door, crosses the room with her soft step, and stands before him; lovely, even in this most unlovely hour of the twenty-four, if Jack had but the eyes or soul to see it. "As though there could ever be any

danger of lecturing between you and me! People whose thoughts, whose actions, are so entirely their own. No, no, Jack—what I want to speak to you about is . . . a simple question of hospitality.”

“Hospitality! I know what you mean by that,” he growls. “You intend me to give a ball, a series of balls, to all these fine new friends of yours. Don’t consult me about it. Hire any public room you choose for the purpose—Lord Stair will see to details for you—and have the goodness to leave my name out altogether in the matter.”

“M. Danton, I am told, is coming to live in London. Before he arrives let it be a settled thing between us how we mean to receive him.”

The latch-key drops through Jack Chamberlayne’s unsteady fingers.

“You—you dare to mention that scoundrel’s name before me!” he gasps, his livid face turning yet one shade more livid.

“I dare most things, Jack. If I did not—well, there would have been no especial difficulty in my seeing M. Danton, and saying nothing to you on the subject. But that is not my way now. I have taken to truth—Heaven help me!—now that truth can avail so little!”

“And you think, knowing all I do, that I will allow you—my wife—to speak to that man again?”

“I think,” says Leah, speaking very low and distinct; far sooner would Jack face passion or violence than that tone—“I think, with all your faults of temper, you are not bad of heart yet. In cold blood, of set purpose, I do not believe that you would wish to drive me quite to desperation.”

“Desperation!” he cries, sinking helplessly into a chair,

"why, what preposterous talk are we coming to now? But you don't mean what you say. You are such an actress, that you never know yourself whether you are acting or not—by Jove you don't! How can a husband forbidding his wife to see her old lover again, drive her to desperation?"

"I am not speaking of generalities—and I don't think this is a time to talk of lovers! I speak of you and myself. If ever human soul was in peril, Jack, 'tis mine—and I ask you—oh, you may call it acting, if you choose, but I am in earnest, horrible earnest. I ask you, my husband, to be my helper."

And before Jack can repulse her, she has sunk down, poor wretch, in her shining silks and jewels at his side, has thrown her arms, with piteous gesture of entreaty, round his neck.



CHAPTER XXVI.

JACK AS OTHELLO.

A PICTURE pointing a moral scarcely less effective, perhaps, than the immortal morning scene of another marriage à la mode, were some modern Hogarth at hand to limn it. The husband, with his worn young face, his eye-lids heavy and red after the night's dissipation; sullen, incredulous. The wife, brilliant in her beauty and in the jewels for which she sold herself, ready to cry *peccavi* at his feet, would he listen!

"I am not much inclined for melodramatic scenes at the best of times, Leah, and I am deucedly disinclined for anything but my pillow at this hour of the morning. However, if you will have the row out, you must. You are to be saved from despe-

ration,' didn't you say, and through me? Oh Lord, the joke is too good!"

Jack laughs—as spectral, joyless a laugh as you can well conceive of—and Leah unclasps her arms, and shifts nervously away from him.

"A joke! As if any matter that has to do with our lives could be *that*. However, we won't stop to quarrel about words, as you are so tired. Jack, my poor boy, do you know that you and I are in an awfully bad way, both of us?"

She has not spoken to him so familiarly for months past; but Jack's haggard face does not soften by a shade. "I know that I am about as bad as a man can be and live," he answers, "but I cannot see what you have to complain of, Mrs. Chamberlayne. Of course, if we get into tall talk about 'human souls' and 'repentance,' I am dumb. As far as dancing, dressing, and making yourself generally notorious goes, you seem to me about on the par with the rest of the world."

"Yes; and there seems a fair prospect of my notoriety increasing. Lord Stair remained here after you and Bell went away to-night——"

"I have not the slightest doubt that Lord Stair remained," interpolates Jack, trenchantly.

"And he seems more sanguine than ever about getting us an invitation to the Duchess of St. Ives' ball on the thirtieth."

"Don't say 'us,' if you please. I never go to balls—of that kind. I want no social advancement bought through my wife's influence over Lord Stair."

"Do you not, Jack? Ah, repeat that—it does me good! Tell me you care enough for me to wish to see all this miserable life of ours altered?"

"I wish to heaven you would say out what you have got to

say plainly and at once," cries Jack, savagely. "You have a request to make about *your former friend*, M. Danton, and you don't know how to word it. I suppose that is the meaning of all this fine circumlocution. It don't impress me one bit, Mrs. Chamberlayne, mind that! I am not quite such a fool as the actions of others would make me appear. What I believe, I believe; what I mean, I mean; and not all the pretty talking, not all the tearful, sentimental balderdash in the world would move me by an inch. If Danton turns up in London, I know pretty well what the fellow is here for, and I forbid you to see him. That's intelligible, I think?"

Leah rises to her feet; white and silent, she stands, watching the set determination of Jack's face. During the vigils she has kept to-night, during the silent hours since Lord Stair left her, heaven knows what resolves for the future, what aspirations towards a better, truer life have traversed her brain. The very mention of Danton's name, the prospect of seeing him, nay, of living only in the same city, of knowing that there is a chance of meeting him in the street, has wrought upon her with a kind of magic might. Dread any disclosure Lord Stair can make! flutter helpless, as a wounded bird, in Lord Stair's hand, for fear! Why, with Danton near, Leah feels 'twere nothing to tell her husband the whole history of her girlish love, own, but not blush over, her weakness, the indiscretion, if you will, of that two hours' starlit walk in the Champs Elysées, and with a soul purged by honest truth-telling, bravely resolve to hold tighter to the duties of her self-imposed lot henceforward.

This was her dream, gazing out into the grey London day-dawn; the nobler impulses all genuine love invokes—must I add, her intense craving for any untried emotion—urging her to

the perilous step of absolute connubial confession. The weak, obstinate face, the ignoble suspicions, the coarse, cruel words (which yet conceal such shrewd worldly sense under their coarseness)—these are the reality.

"You have not much mercy on me, Jack, and I suppose I have no right to expect it. Perhaps if you knew the whole truth, instead of half, it would be better."

"The whole truth!" he cries, looking up at her with fierce suddenly awakened doubt, "what the —— do you mean by that? What more is there for me to know than the one degrading fact that this man, Danton, was your lover before you married me? By heavens!" And now he starts to his feet, he stands close, threateningly confronting her. "If anything more than I do know should ever come to my ears, it will be the last day you and I live under the same roof together—make your mind easy as to that. You heard me give my opinion about Tom Lytton's treatment of his wife, did you not?"

"Yes, I heard you."

"Well, and I repeat that Tom Lytton acted right, more than right! And if I found my wife had compromised her good name—ay, ever so slightly, before her marriage, by the Lord that made her and me, she should go!"

"And after her marriage?" But all the transitory softness has died from Leah's face, the old evil glitter is coming in her eyes. "She may lead what life she likes *then*, I presume, so long as it be the stereotyped life of the world and of society—dress, order her equipages, form her manners upon the model of the last recognised adventuress of the hour, pile on false hair, mountains high, if fashion order it, wear Grecian drapery, rouge on her cheeks, antimony round her eyes—all, anything, and the husband will make no sign; only shrug his shoulders, and sup-

pose, cynically hopeful, that his wife is no worse than the rest ! But let the same husband discover, by accident, that once, when she was a girl, this woman loved, that once that miserable soul of hers forgot for a day, an hour, to calculate, and he has a right to treat her weakness as a crime. Oh, this is manliness, this is justice, is it not ?”

“I call it claptrap,” replies Jack, appositely. “You have the gift of fluent speaking, Leah, and I have not ; but I have a few grains of sense in my head, nevertheless. The goings-on of all the fast wives in London have nothing to do with one fact—that it was a disgrace in you, an engaged girl, to encourage Danton, or any other man, to be your lover. If I had known of your disloyalty in time, I would have walked away from you—yes, at the altar steps. If I find you make an attempt at renewing it now, we don’t stop another day under the same roof. I may be an idiot in many things. I have my own ideas of honour and dishonour, and I shall stick to them.”

“Honour ! How excellently well that word sounds from your lips ! Your life, your associates, your habitual treatment of me, are strictly in accordance with these fine principles, are they not ?”

Jack Chamberlayne turns white to his very temples. “It is not a question of my life at all. I have never held up my conduct as a model for yours, have I ? Look at home, Mrs. Chamberlayne, before you condemn me for what I do, or do not do. Look at your little friendship for Lord Stair——”

“I understand, sir, I understand,” cries Leah, transported beyond herself by passion. “My follies are to condone yours—that is the proper term, I think ? And we each think no evil, and get on together with tolerable forbearance, as the world

goes. Jack, before you came in, as I sat here alone, after Lord Stair had gone away, do you know what I was weak—contemptibly weak—enough to hope?”

“You have told me. That I would allow you to renew your acquaintance with M. Danton.”

“I was weak enough to hope that you and I—Jack Chamberlayne and his wife—might be more to each other than we have ever been, and make a fresh start yet. I meant, as heaven is my witness, to speak such truth to you as I never spoke before since our marriage. I meant—but it matters nothing now. The weakness is past. I see how far you are likely to appreciate truth-telling, and you may be sure I shall not err in that direction again.”

She pauses; her breast heaving heavily, her eyes suffused. Any man but a Jack Chamberlayne must surely, at such a moment, believe in her sincerity, take her, with all her faults, back to his heart, and leave his future to heaven and to her. But Jack is literally without the capacity for this sort of unbidden instinctive forgiveness. In a certain stumbling way the creature is honest; holds with the rigidity of a narrow intelligence, to the word that he has spoken, the principle of prejudice that he has once acknowledged as right. Ask bread from stones sooner than generous emotion from a man whose moral and physical nature had been wrecked by such a youth as his!

“You are a deuced good actress, Leah, deuced good! Unfortunately I have seen too much of that sort of thing, before and behind the curtain, to be fetched by it now. I remember Paris, and how you deceived me up to our wedding-day, and past. And I remember Rome, and Deb’s letter. The same woman will never deceive me twice, if I know it.”

"She will never try. Don't let your peace be disturbed on that point."

"And I may go to bed, I hope. The scene is ended. We have not gained very much by all our talking, that I can see."

"Not very much. Still, we understand each other a little more clearly than we did this morning; that is something gained. You don't want our lives changed it seems——"

"I don't intend your visiting-list to include M. Danton, my dear. Keep to the point at issue. If that man turns up in London . . . he *is* in London, by ——!" cries Jack with abrupt energy. "I know that he is here, at this moment . . . you have my orders to cut him if you should see him in the street, to refuse him admittance if he has the impertinence to call at this hotel. You hear me?"

Leah makes no answer. She moves away from him, walks to the window, and there stands, stonily gazing out at the prospect of closed shutters and empty pavements it commands.

"You hear me, my dear?" repeats Jack, grimly affectionate. "If our Paris acquaintance, M. Danton, should happen to turn up in London, I consider it better, after certain little untoward circumstances that are done with, if not forgotten, that the acquaintance shall not be renewed."

"If M. Danton should come to London," and as she speaks, Leah turns; she looks at her husband with coldly steady eyes—"if M. Danton should come to London, or to any place on earth where I am, and we meet, I shall hold out my hand to him if he will receive it! And until the hour of my death I shall call M. Danton my friend—the only man in this whole desolate world of whom I can say so much."

"You will?"

"So help me God, I will."

"Very well, then, Mrs. Chamberlayne,"—strengthening epithets must at this point be lavishly imagined,—“you have expressed your determination; now hear mine. You will hold out your hand to M. Danton, you say; you will continue to call him your friend? Do so! And on the day that I discover your treachery, I will bring you to the open shame you deserve by wishing you good-bye for ever. As you remark, we understand each other.”

"To a nicety! Only it may happen that we attach a slightly opposite meaning to that term ‘shame.’"

"The world has not got two meanings for it, so far as a woman is concerned, as you perhaps will learn to your cost before long."

These are Jack's last words. Of whatever else Leah may be ignorant, she knows one thing now—the precise amount of standing-ground upon which her trembling footsteps still rest.

CHAPTER XXVII

TRANSFORMATION.

THE assertion savours of paradox, yet I believe it to be true, that had Leah never come across Danton, or known pure love's taste, her chances of salvation as Jack Chamberlayne's wife had been greater.

I said at the commencement of this story that hers were the very virtues to derive nourishment from prosperity; lapped in soft silks, fed on costly food from costly dishes, and crowned with

irreproachable sets of emeralds and diamonds for the world's approval. Married for money, with neither remembrance nor expectancy of aught beyond, Leah—doubt it not—had been circumspect enough. She is Colonel Pascal's child, and, but for that one accidental meeting, might have walked from her cradle to her grave with every tender, perilous faculty inherited from her mother undeveloped. Do you suppose there are not, in most of us, some finer potentialities than those which the dull treadmill of our lot has served to awaken?

. . . But to a soul that has once gone out of itself in love, danger, pleasure, pain, all human chances of evil and of good are multiplied for ever. Why, this Leah whom we see now is literally not the same woman whom we first saw essaying sprays and coronets before her glass in Paris. To Leah Pascal nature was a background, more or less becoming, for picnics and garden-parties with Leah Pascal always as the prominent foreground adornment; art, in the form of royal academies, or operas, a convenient means of seeing the latest fashions, and displaying to the world one's own latest conquest. Leah Chamberlayne, feverishly alive to every external influence, will gaze at a midnight sky or amber sunset—even amidst the turmoil of a London season—with emotion as much beyond her tears as it is beyond her power of analysis. The scent of certain flowers thrills her to pain. Despite her want of ear, music begins to have a charmed voice for her. And all this, while the sisterhood of folly are copying her bonnets, the brotherhood of inanity contending for—alas, and winning—her smiles! An aspirant leader of fashion, and the soul within her struggling hourly into passionate life. Monstrous anomaly! I would say, had not experience taught me to look for *every* anomaly, *every* con-

tradition in the heart that has newly passed from self's narrow darkness into love.

Imagine a man born blind who should come unexpectedly into great wealth, and just about the same time receive, as by miracle, the gift of sight. The crowd thinks of nothing save his equipages, his town and country house, his entertainments. But the man himself — could millions of gold, do you believe, affect him strongly with the fresh raptures of grass and river and sky bewildering his sense at every turn? Money that can ransom us from no deep grief can assuredly purchase for us no exalted joy. Leah has inherited her very wishes, "the buildings of her fancy," with the certainty, daily strengthening, of their life tenure, and derives from them not one tithe of the pleasure or the pain that "*Si tu savais*" played by a street organ, or the sudden sweetness of a bunch of violets, have power to bring her.

Possibly things might have gone better if she had had one wholesome source of interest derived from money, could have seen Deb growing strong through its agency, Deb overjoyed with London toys and riding-habits made by the tailor. But fortune, who so seldom comes to us with both hands full, has in this matter been froward. Scarcely was Leah's splendid marriage six months old, when Colonel Pascal, to his mingled amazement and joy, found the burthen of existence lightened of another daughter. "You recollect your dear Aunt Hepzibah?" Thus he announced the stroke of good fortune to Leah. "The only one of the family who, during the trials of my early married days, remained a friend to your sainted mother. Your Aunt Hepzibah, lately left a widow and independent, has offered to adopt my beloved little Deb as her own child. The feelings with which I contemplate such a separation I leave to

my Leah to guess. But what parent would allow selfish considerations to interfere with a child's welfare? Deb is to be clothed, educated, provided for by my admirable sister-in-law, and starts for her new home on Monday." And this was Deb's postscript: "Aunt hepzibah lives at Ramsgitt, and there are Shells and Donkeys and a tortis-Hell cat with Kittens, and I can't sleep at night for joy. And Papa and Naomi *will live alone!*"

So, as far as rescuing Deb from pauperism went, the sacrifice or her marriage need never have been made. The letter reached Leah at Monaco, just before she began the experiment of gambling, and gave, perhaps, the finishing touch needed to her profound sense of self-abasement. She went, loaded with toys and sweetmeats, to Ramsgate, two days after her return to England, and found Deb almost rosy; tumultuously glad to see Leah, of course, but too deeply engaged with a palace of dirt and oyster-shells that she was erecting in Aunt Hepzibah's garden for the tortis-Hell, cat to give more than lukewarm attention to the very costliest of the London presents.

"And when you come again bring the child nothing," said Aunt Hepzibah, a faded kindly woman, with eyes that spoke to Leah of her mother. "She loves you better than anything on earth. Don't spoil the love by making it mercenary. When you come, you bring yourself. Be sure that will always be joy enough for Deb."

Money of no use there; nay, it would seem a barrier rather between herself and the child's affection. Aunt Hepzibah's means were modest; she lived in a plain little house; dressed in old-fashioned black; kept one old servant. Leah, in her trailing silks, with her atmosphere of London life and frivolity, felt more and more out of her element each time she went to

Ramsgate. And then Deb's questions, asked with Deb's eyes upon her face, were in themselves not reassuring. "Was Leah happy? What, *quite* happy with Jack for a husband?" For Deb, as of old, displays what Montaigne calls the "*esprit prime-sautier*," going at the first bound to the core of things. "And had she forgotten Danton, and could she get no nicer friend in all England than ugly Lord Stair?" On one occasion his lordship had constituted himself Mrs. Chamberlayne's escort down the river. "Did Jack detest Lord Stair less than he used at Madame Bonchrétien's? And why had Leah taken to putting white dust on her face? Was it to look like Cousin Bell, or the other fine town lady they had talked of in Paris—Madame Tatters?"

Thus the little girl would prattle; while Leah, silent, ill at ease, felt that the child killed her with her talk, and gradually lost courage more and more for her visits to Aunt Hepzibah's cottage and to innocence. So even her love for Deb, the one feeling that before her marriage served to keep her heart sweet, has in a manner been slain, and by her own suicidal hand. Reader, if this woman has failed to win your pity hitherto, refuse it not now; she has grown to shrink before a child's eyes—to dread a child's tongue!

A fortnight, three weeks, go by; at last, on the Sunday forenoon succeeding her explanation with Jack, Leah remembers with a start of remorse, that almost a month has passed without her paying Deb one visit. Shall she give up her hopes of meeting the Duchess at the Zoo, and spend the hot hours of the afternoon in Aunt Hepzibah's sea-side cottage and away from Babylon? It is her custom on Sunday morning to pursue Royalty with the mob to the chapel in Margaret Street. But

to-day her heavy eyes turn reluctant from the light at the usual hour of waking ; and by the time she has risen, pretended to breakfast, and dressed, it is past one o'clock. Too late to think of Ramsgate and Deb, even were one in spirits for the expedition. And then, there is her half-promise of meeting Lord Stair—as matters stand now, were it not an act well-nigh of self-destruction to risk incurring Lord Stair's displeasure ? And while we live must we not live ? Leah's head aches, her heart aches ; she wants the old panacea, excitement, to bring her round. Chloral, or whatever poison stood readiest on her dressing-table, yielded her as much sleep as comes within the reach of poisons, last night. Now, for the day's refreshment, she needs movement, admiration, flattery—I had almost written, needs Lord Stair. “ And has Madame forgotten the Parisian dress and bonnet that the world has not seen ? ” suggests the consoling voice of Mademoiselle Melanie—Mademoiselle Melanie, anxious for freedom to appear in *her* Parisian finery before *her* world. Put them on ; with such amount of white dust, such slender administration of antimony as the occasion requires, order the carriage, and start—to Mrs. Baltimore's, as it is yet too early for the Zoo. Better an hour or so of Bell and Bell's philosophy than the companionship of her own thoughts, the remembrance of the words that came from Jack's lips last night.



CHAPTER XXVIII.

ROSE-COLOURED BLINDS.

BELL BALTIMORE inhabits a gew-gaw little doll's house in Curzon Street. The flower-decked passage, the fountain in

the conservatory, six feet by four, on the first landing, the prevalence of rose-colour, patchouli, and half-light advise you what order of hostess you may expect before penetrating to boudoir or drawing-room. The house belongs to Mr. Baltimore ; so poor Bell lives rent-free, with a couple of women servants for her retinue. "In my half-widowed position," she will tell you, her blue eyes suffused, "and considering Bob's immense expenses in Russia (a pair of gloves costs two roubles in St. Petersburg), I feel it a duty to economise. I try to make my nut-shell pretty. A little fresh chintz, and an occasional visit to Covent Garden Market do not ruin one. But I cannot entertain, and my friends know it. Whoever cares for me must care for me alone. Five o'clock tea is the beginning and the end of my hospitalities."

And this is true to the letter. Bell, having reached an age when even a pretty woman comes to acknowledge food as one of the substantial goods of human life, will accept dinners right and left—Richmond dinners, white-bait dinners, all dinners. She gives nothing. Deep hidden in the shrines of that cold heart, those who know her best affirm that the great god, Money, reigns supreme ; that not pleasure, dress, love of admiration, but a solid balance at her banker's, is the real motive power of Bell's seemingly butterfly existence. The accusation may be true or false. Towards herself, for certain, Mrs. Baltimore displays no grudging or parsimonious spirit. Wines of the best vintage, the earliest fruits and vegetables of the season, game when game is at its dearest—of all these does she partake without stint. "My health requires it," says Bell ; that same plastic health that would not stand the cold of St. Petersburg, and required horse exercise at Scarborough ! "It really does seem horribly selfish to order nice little dishes all for oneself,

but I should starve on the diet that suffices for robust digestions. Good food is my medicine."

So, when Leah enters, on this particular Sunday, Bell is still in her own little morning-room, with the remains of "medicine," in the shape of a plate or two and an emptied champagne bottle, pushed close on a small round table beside her sofa. Not even her most intimate female friends can number or catalogue Mrs. Baltimore's meals. Breakfast at ten; at one, luncheon; five o'clock tea; dinner; and, after ball or theatre, supper; with early cups of chocolate, with tastes of liqueur, with glasses of wine and sandwiches innumerable. It is astonishing the quantity of eating and drinking that a delicate woman going the mill-round of hard-and-fast London life can get through; more astonishing still, that she can at the same time consume morphia, chloral, or belladonna, at night, and live to tell you of it. But fashion, that subverts so much, seems able to subvert even physiological laws with impunity.

The blinds of Mrs. Baltimore's sanctum are thick, the atmosphere is perfumed; Bell herself, all white embroidery and cambric, with a complexion like a girl's, and a knot of infantine blue ribbon in her blonde hair, forms a spot of pleasant cool light amidst the deep crimson hangings of the room. But Leah's jaundiced sense detects the mould above the rose; ether amidst the millefleurs; the deathly pallor of fatigue under the rouge so cunningly employed to hide it; artifice—that artifice to which, at twenty years of age, she is herself fast drifting—everywhere. Never can she visit Bell Baltimore of a morning without reflecting that to *this*—ether and rouge, rose-lined blinds and satiety, will her present life lead her, just as swiftly, as irrevocably, as to death itself.

"Why, what a solemn Sunday face, my dear!" cries Bell,

arranging herself upright among her cushions, with a pitying air of friendly criticism. "Anything worse than usual happened between you and Jack, or is it only the effect of your dress? The dress, I think. These ghastly new combinations of colour are a crucial trial to one's looks."

The ghastly combination is citron, palely delicate as an April sunrise, relieved by sparing touches of warm chocolate maroon—a mixture strictly in accordance with nature's chromatic laws; the great Venetians show it us often on their canvases, and one that sets off every charm of Leah's picturesque Eastern face to admiration.

"My costume is a work of art, Bell," she remarks, with quiet certainty. Let heart, let conscience suffer as they will—impugn Leah's taste in millinery, and the master-instinct re-asserts itself! "It is Worth's last creation, and came accompanied by an *autograph letter* from himself. But your curtains are so cruelly thick, it is impossible to judge of colour here. Oh, but I must, Bell! I am determined to make you a convert against your will."

And before Mrs. Baltimore can stay her hand, Leah has drawn a curtain aside, and the June sunshine sends in its flood of pitiless truth upon them both.

Mrs. Baltimore actually shudders under its contact. A woman who fights against age, converts light, air, sunshine, all the good friends of humanity, into enemies. Leah, in her pale, flawless beauty, stands calmly self-possessed.

"Now that you see things unbiassed by rose-colour, confess that my dress is a work of art, dear Bell!"

"It may be a work of art, but it makes the complexion look green," says Mrs. Baltimore, holding her position stoutly. The June sunshine may do its worst! In the face of the foe—I

mean of her dearest friend—Bell will not retrograde an inch. "And I am quite sure English people are too uncultivated to appreciate it. Those startling contrasts may create a sensation at Trouville or Monaco. They will never meet with real success in London."

"It depends so much upon what people call a 'success,'" says Leah wearily, and quitting her place beside the window. "Exchange the word for 'notoriety,' and in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, I suppose one would do pretty nearly as well as the other."

"Perhaps. Talking of notoriety, what did you think of the parable of the Lyttons last night, or rather of Jack's commentaries thereupon? Had I been in your place, my dear child," says Bell, looking at her friend's face hard, "I cannot say that I should have felt cheerful, under the circumstances."

"It would be no easy thing to feel cheerful with a Hetty Robarts present," Leah answers evasively. "If it had not been for you, Bell, what spirits, what tempers we must all have sunk to—poor Jack especially."

"I believe I gave poor Jack one bit of sound advice," says Bell. "Not to venture on high tragedy without studying the part well first. We have had a good many renderings of 'Othello' on the London stage—French, American, Italian. We have yet to see him interpreted by the implacable English husband of the nineteenth century!"

"Whoever plays Othello, do not cast me for Desdemona, please. Tragedy is quite as much out of my line of life as it is out of Jack's."

"*Tragedy!*" repeats Mrs. Baltimore, with that cold smile that ever trenches so nearly on a sneer. "I should say tragedy was

done with for ever on the day you bade good-bye to the Rue Castiglione. Our good-looking tenor—what was his name, Leah? the man with a profile like Giuglini's, and an objectionable manner?—might have been capable of playing a tragic part, perhaps; but now—shall I tell you what you and Jack really remind me of, my dear? A pair of spoilt children perpetually quarrelling with each other out of idleness, and because they have more pretty clothes, and toys, and sweetmeats than are good for them."

"Pretty clothes, and toys, and sweetmeats are scarcely enough, you see, to fill two grown-up people's lives."

"I am not so sure of that. Of course, the toy must be varied to suit different dispositions. One man has his yacht, another his seat in Parliament, a third philanthropy, a fourth a theatre. And, for us women—oh, the pretty clothes and sweetmeats are enough, I suppose, for us!"

"And you believe such an existence could ever be sufficient for happiness?"

"Happiness! Leah, you pay too much attention to your own pulse for health. That 'greatest happiness' question is one wise people let alone. We spend life, not in being happy, but in playing at being happy. Novels divert one's attention—or might do so, if they portrayed creatures of flesh and blood, not heroines: or if novelists belonged to the world they try to describe—at all events, they keep one from that destroyer of one's good looks—thought. And dress would be an amusement, if the milliners did not take it so completely into their own hands. And then there is riding, till the Row gets too hot; and yachting—no, I believe all sane human beings hate yachting the moment they find themselves out of smooth water. Pleasant little dinners, such as you gave us last night (minus Hetty),

are, I fancy, about the highest, as they certainly are the most enduring, form of earthly enjoyment."

"Unfortunately, I have a marked distaste for little dinners," says Leah with a sigh.

"You will like them better as you grow older, my dear child. I remember the time when I looked upon an invitation to dinner very nearly in the light of an affront. And now—now," says Bell, with resignation, "I have learned to estimate most men and most things, little dinners included, at their just value."

"And the end . . . the end of it all?" cries Leah, half passionately. "Dancing, dressing, yachting—as long as you take care to keep your barque in smooth water—the eternal Row, the eternal skating in the rink, and Richmond and Hurlingham! Oh, Bell! I say, what is the *end* of all this vapid, meaningless existence we lead—you and I, the worse for ourselves, like the rest?"

At the energy of Leah's voice Mrs. Baltimore's blue eyes open somewhat wider than their wont. "The end of it all, for me, is to be little dinners, we decided. For you——"

"Pray do not hesitate."

"For you—let me reflect! Playing at sentiment, probably, for the next dozen years or so, until 'the last words of the last romance' are definitely spoken, a gradual subsidence, like mine, alas! towards the art of dining—provided always that your digestion lasts! People of bilious temperament have, it must be acknowledged, long odds against them in that matter of digestion——"

"And then?"

"Well, then—wrinkles, I assume, and whist. What other conclusion is there for any one? Talking of wrinkles, have you seen the beautiful Patty Addison since their return to town?"

My dear, the poor thing looks older than her mother ! Not all the dress and cosmetics in the world can patch her up into youth any longer, and yet she has had the audacity to appear in a Charlotte Corday bonnet."

And so on to scandal, and the dressmakers. When you have had half an hour of Bell Baltimore's philosophy, you have had a lifetime of it ; just as, when you have known one Bell Baltimore, you have known every other woman of her type.

Not much has that type altered during the last hundred years—"Metaphysics and flirtation," wrote the shrewd biographer of the Châtelets and the Espinasses. "Metaphysics and flirtation, systems of nature, fashion of dress-caps, vanity, curiosity, jealousy, atheism, rheumatism, bouts-rimés, noble sentiments, and rouge-pots."

Novel-reading may have taken the place of bouts-rimés ; neuralgia, not rheumatism, be the malady in vogue ; noble sentiments may have fallen into disuse. These are but variations of detail and the hour. The type of woman remains unchanged. What shall we say of the society, dining, dressing, pleasure-seeking, God-ignoring, to which she first owed her existence ?

CHAPTER XXIX.

HER GRACE OF ST. IVES.

WE may say thus much, at least, that its creed and practice are logically consistent, its wisdom is justified of her children. "Love nothing, mourn for nothing. Eat, drink, sleep, and to-

morrow *die*, expectant of the nihilism in which we have lived."

As Leah drives away from Curzon Street, something of this philosophy of despair animates her heart. The future that lies before her, whether she again meet Danton or not—ah, that, like the "greatest happiness" question, is a matter well left alone.

To-day she will enjoy herself. The sky overhead is blue, and she is twenty, and her dress becomes her, and she will have Lord Stair's homage to display before half London as usual. On to the Zoo, with hopes that some other excitement than a dual dinner at home may arise for the evening! Then, sleep arrived at as best one can, and her morning canter with Lord Stair in the Row, and the polo match—Lord Stair has promised to drive there with her and Jack, in the afternoon; and then engagements two deep (each including Lord Stair), for the evening. Is there time after all for the destroyer, thought, to vex one—time for more than skin-deep, transient suffering in a life of *pleasure* like this?

Lord Stair's arm assists her from her carriage at the gates of the Zoological Gardens; Lord Stair whispers the reassuring news that the Duchess of St. Ives is already here, and without her daughter; so that, if Mrs. Chamberlayne have still any inclination for the ball on the thirtieth—

"Any inclination!" cries Leah, with her bright cold gaiety, the Prince Charming's very January sunshine. "Why, I have scarcely slept six winks for thinking of my coming grandeur. Fancy poor obscure me dancing in a quadrille made up of earls and marchionesses—perhaps, if I behave myself extraordinarily well, with that bulwark of all the rectitudes, Lady Violet McLagan for a vis-à-vis! How can you ask such a question,

Milor? and what, in the name of everything absurd, makes you call me 'Mrs. Chamberlayne' with such an air of severity?"

An inexperienced man might pardonably be led astray by her tone. But Lord Stair has learnt his lesson too well for any change of mood in Leah to put him off his guard a second time.

"Whatever absurdity I may commit to-day, you are answerable for it," he answers. "In the first place, because I have carbonic acid on the brain—the result of a couple of hours' vain expectation of seeing you last night at the cotton people's. In the second—well, I have always considered you rather nice-looking as you know—but in that dress——"

"Tell me, if you think it a crucial trial to the complexion?" exclaims Leah with animation. "No; that question inevitably leads up to a compliment. Tell me honestly if my dress—Worth's last—is in good taste? I have been calling on Bell Baltimore, and she assured me, on her faith as a friend, that such an atrocious combination could never meet with success except at Trouville or Monaco."

"Poor Mrs. Baltimore! What compliment of mine could be flattery as thorough as her dispraise! The dress is Worth's, Mrs. Chamberlayne—well, Leah, then, if you command it—and the wearer is . . . Leah!"

How much sweeter can truth be made than falsehood, in the hands of a competent artist! Leah blushes with pleasure at Lord Stair's reply; and thus blushing, and with her lovely face upturned to his, makes her appearance before the world, or such section of the world as is taking its pleasure, moult tristement, upon the well-baked turf of the Zoo, this Sunday afternoon.

And her success is beyond dispute. Never did propheteess,

even in her own country, prove false than Bell Baltimore. Women look at Worth's last, and envy the wearer. Men look at the wearer, and envy Lord Stair. At every step she takes she gains an admirer, or loses a shred of reputation. Her success is genuine.

"And now for our Duchess," says Lord Stair, when they have two or three times made the circuit of the lawn. "I pointed her out to you in Kensington Gardens, the other day, did I not?"

"A painted old lady, with closed eyelids, who gets up for sixteen? The difficulty is how to distinguish the Duchess of St. Ives from all the other less exalted old ladies with closed eyelids and paint, and who get up for sixteen!"

"The Duchess wears an eau de Nil dress," whispers Lord Stair, "and at this moment is standing not six yards ahead of us. Come, I will introduce you before Lady Violet and the McLagan appear on the scene. Lady Vi never loved me, even before she turned saint, and is not likely to extend a favouring hand to any of my friends. Indeed, you must not mind a little rude treatment from either mother or daughter. What we want is an invitation to the ball on the thirtieth, not politeness."

Need I enter upon a description of the well-known Dowager Duchess of St. Ives—friskiest of dowagers still, although with the marriage of Lady Vi to the great Glasgow whisky-lord the days of cakes and ale may be said to have passed? Ah, those palmy days, not to be spoken of now save in a whisper! Did ever duchess and her daughter enjoy themselves like these two? At one time seeing life behind the scenes of the London theatres, with the last handsome star or aspirant young actor in favour; at another, dancing, incognita, at the opera balls in Paris. Now

shrimping, picturesquely barefoot, among the fisher-girls in the Scilly Isles or at Biarritz. Fast, popular, reckless as to men's respect or women's censure always!

The Duchess, née Mullins, must have possessed no common charms of person in her youth; and certain tricks of manner, certain ineradicable tossings of the head, and gestures learnt before the glass, betray, her dearest friends suspect, an early acquaintance with the foot-lights. But on this point history is uncertain. She is quite an old woman now (alas! Lady Vi's fortieth birthday had struck before the wayward beauty consented to barter the splendid name of Fitz-Osborn against the siller of the McLagan), but keeps her threescore years at bay valiantly; wears tight-fitting waists, bonnets that would not misbecome a maiden of eighteen, and has her colouring attended to by the very first professional artists in enamel. At a due perspective, just until you hear the shrill old voice, or see the withered old complexion in a side light, you might mistake her Grace for a woman of eight-and-thirty still.

Lord Stair walks up to her, his hat in his hand—whatever the shortcomings of the inner man—the one finished Chesterfield, outwardly, that London society can show! He has been an immense favourite for a good many years past with her Grace; and not, as yet, discerning that Leah is his companion, she receives him with all the smiles and airs of a juvenile coquette, extending three playful old primrose-coloured fingers for him to press.

"You are a bad man, Lord Stair. I vow I don't know whether you deserve to be spoken to. Pray how long is it since you have been to see me?"

"An eternity, judging by my own feelings," says Lord Stair; "but, in plain fact, less than a week. The fact is, you are

cruel enough to shut your door upon me now," he adds, bending over her with an air of reproachful gallantry, and lowering his voice to a whisper. "In the old days——"

"Ah, don't talk to me of the old days," she interrupts him, with coy sprightliness. "In the old days you used to be a man of exclusive tastes. You don't care for me or for my world now. Pray, who is our latest rival? Who is this little person with the Jewish profile whom you have promoted from the ranks?" For the Duchess of St. Ives, née Mullins, is conservative to the backbone, rigidly unbending on the score of birth and ancestry. Are not all chance-made greatnesses liable to the same weakness—the deceit of the eye "that when others come on they think themselves to go back!" "A Mrs. Chatterton, I am told, or Chancellor, or some such name?"

A less wary tactician might well be embarrassed by the situation, considering that the little person with the Jewish profile now stands within less than three yards of the Duchess. Lord Stair not only ignores that cause for embarrassment exists, but, in the coolest manner imaginable, presents Leah on the instant to her Grace. The daughter of one of his oldest friends (Lord Stair first met Colonel Pascal, under Bonchrétien's roof, ten months ago in Paris). He, Lord Stair, has been wishing, ever since Mrs. Chamberlayne's arrival in town, for an opportunity of introducing her to the Duchess of St. Ives.

The Duchess of St. Ives glances through a thin chink of eyelid at Leah's fair young face; then relaxes the muscles of her neck by about a third of an inch, and stares vacantly away, under the fringe of her parasol, at nothingness. Not an encouraging glance or bow; but those who aspire to the slippery prize of Duchesses must risk many a stumble before that prize is reached. Leah stands calm, smiling, self-collected. The

most hardened title-hunter in London could scarcely display airier callousness to slight than does Colonel Pascal's daughter at this moment. And her Mentor feels proud of her.

"One meets a horrible mob of people at the Zoo," says the Duchess, addressing herself, pointedly, to Lord Stair. "In former days it was pleasant enough, but now you seem to run across your dressmaker's apprentices at every turn. We are not only educating our masters, it seems, but learning to associate with them. Pray, who are all these shocking creatures, Lord Stair? Come and take a turn, and divert me. I remember the time when I used to say there was no man in London whose *mauvaise langue* could divert me like Lord Stair's. But, of course, that belongs to the past."

She moves away, holding her parasol well between herself and the "dressmakers' apprentices," and, with Lord Stair in devoted attendance, commences her walk; Leah—who has really no alternative but to walk likewise—upon the side of the parasol. And so the world beholds them.

"Do you see, my love?" whispers Mr. Robarts to his Hetty; for it chances that the Robartses form two units in the crowd of nobodies among the chairs. "Our cousin Leah is on the high road to ruin, doubtless, but her worst enemies must admit that she is going there in good style. You are aware, I hope, Hetty, that the high-rouged notability with whom Jack's wife is walking is the Dowager Duchess of St. Ives?"

"The Dowager—*Duchess*—of St. Ives!" stammers Hetty, feeling her very finger-ends tingle as she gives utterance to the honied unfamiliar words.

"The real live Duchess of St. Ives, widow of the last, mother of the present Duke. Not, perhaps," says Mr. Robarts, "if history be true, an old lady whose antecedents would stand the

strictest research—but that, Henrietta, is no business of yours or mine. Leniency towards the trifling sins of those above us in station is, I consider, a duty, and a very solemn one, too, in these all-levelling times.”

“You may sneer at what others venerate, if you like, Mr. Robarts. Probably, if you had had the advantage of mixing from childhood with the aristocracy, you would show less of this small bitterness in speaking of them. For my own part,” cries Hetty, with a burst of generous magnanimity, “I feel more and more disposed to think no evil of your cousin’s wife. How is it possible for *me* to be a judge of her temptations? Brought suddenly forward, poor thing, from some fifth-rate class of society into the world, and without the inestimable blessing of a refined early training to hold her straight!”

“Your sentiments do you honour, my love. I hope you will stick to them, if at any future time our cousin’s wife should fall upon dark days—an accident that may happen, even with members of the aristocracy for one’s friends. See, they are coming this way. Now, Henrietta, if we can only get Mrs. Chamberlayne to notice us, we shall have it in our power to say that we have been bowed to by a near relation who was conversing on terms of intimacy with a duchess and a viscount.”

But Mrs. Chamberlayne, it would seem, has no intention of noticing her Bayswater cousins from the exalted state in which she at present finds herself. She sees them, as she sees all other terrestrial objects, through a sort of halo. What should her mind really grasp and recognise save the one dazzling fact of her own position? She, Leah Pascal, the girl who ten months before wore darned stockings (three clean pairs a week), permitted to walk beside the parasol of a duchess!—a well white-


washed old duchess, who attends Court christenings, heads subscription lists, gives away the prizes in industrial schools, and who, from her youth upward, has been able to set conventionalities, one might almost venture to say moralities, aside, at her pleasure !

They saunter to the extreme end of the lawn ; the expression of her Grace's roseate-tinted lips gradually relaxing under the influence of her companion's gallant speeches ; they retrace their footsteps ; ere long Lord Stair descries, in the direction of the bridge, the advancing figures of Lady Violet McLagan and her husband. And all this time not one syllable has the Duchess vouchsafed to speak to the little person with the Jewish profile, not one tangible step has been gained towards the goal of Leah's hopes, and of Lord Stair's manœuvring—an invitation for the Duchess's ball on the thirtieth.

Abruptly, without preamble, Lord Stair, like the veteran he is, surprises, and takes the position by a coup de main. When a woman, young or old, resolutely refuses to look at, or speak to, another woman, stealthy approaches, scientific undermining, are about as useful as they would be against the Rock of Gibraltar. And still an adroit, unlooked-for stratagem may bring her to capitulate.

The Duchess of St. Ives really likes Lord Stair ; as far as a Chloe of sixty can entertain such feelings towards a Daphnis twenty years her junior, I would say she has a weakness for him ; and Daphnis, not unmindful of the fact, resolves to turn this weakness to account.

Bending over her pleadingly, " You can afford, better than most women, to be generous," he whispers, with abrupt earnestness of tone. " For the sake—well, for the sake of the old friendship there has been between us, I want you to do me a



favour. Invite Mrs. Chamberlayne and her husband to this ball you are giving on the thirtieth."

The Duchess of St. Ives' eyelids unclosed to their fullest extent.

"Mrs. Chamberlayne and her husband—who are they, pray?—where are they? I have not the remotest idea what you are talking about."

"Mrs. Chamberlayne is—exactly on the other side of your parasol," says Lord Stair. "Her husband, to all intents and purposes, may be termed non-existent."

"A great pity the wife is not non-existent also! You ask me to do impossibilities. If these people were in any decent position, in spite of—well, in spite of the young woman's name being a great deal too much on men's tongues, Lord Stair, I might——"

"Duchess! It is unlike you to show such small feminine censoriousness."

"But I have not myself only to think of. Violet looks over my lists, and puts a cross against whatever names she chooses. I am getting an old woman; I cannot be at the trouble of arguing on subjects that don't interest me with Violet."

"And if, some fine day, Violet chose to strike out my name, it must go, I conclude?"

"I am not talking of old friends, or of people of my own world. Violet looks over the new names, and strikes out those she considers the most objectionable amongst them."

"The only objectionable quality Mrs. Chamberlayne can be said to possess is her beauty."

"Her what?" cries the old Duchess with tart asperity. Happily the band is playing a deafening set of waltzes just at present, so the conversation does not reach Leah in its integrity. "Well, I used to think you, with all your sins, a man of dis-

crimination. A poor, sallow-looking little Jewess girl like that a beauty!"

"To my own taste, most certainly not," answers Lord Stair, with brave unfaithfulness. "No women, as you know, are handsome in my eyes, save the fairest of the fair." The Duchess, in her youth, must have been a brilliant, reddish blonde; such, at least, is the type aimed at now by her artists in perukes and enamel. "All the very young fellows at the clubs, I believe, consider Mrs. Chamberlayne good-looking, or it is the fashion of the moment for them to say so. For myself—the truth is, I have reasons that I will tell you of some day for wishing to help on her father's daughter if I can. And you are the one woman in London whom I would ask to give her a helping hand."

And the Duchess of St. Ives melts. Something in Lord Stair's voice has really set such remnant of a heart as the old coquette may be said to possess a-beating.

"I shall never get Vi to forgive me, or her husband either. If I followed my son-in-law's wishes, I should never invite any one but princes of the blood, and the family, to the hundredth cousin, of the McLagans. But upon my word, there will be such a crush, you might introduce your laundress and no one be the wiser; and of course you can explain to these people that one chance invitation does *not* constitute an acquaintance."

And then she raises her parasol by an inch: she looks at Leah through a slightly wider chink of eyelid than upon their first introduction.

"You have not been long in town, Lord Stair tells me, Mrs. Chatterton, and it really is impossible for me to pay morning visits. However, if you like to dispense with formalities. I am giving a dance on the thirtieth, and shall be happy——"

There is not time for another syllable. Lady Violet and her husband have at this moment emerged from the crowd not a dozen paces distant, and, almost before Lord Stair has been able to whisper his thanks, or get Leah safely out of the way of danger, the mother and daughter are standing by each other's side.

Lady Violet—that lovely Lady Violet for whose smiles all men once contended—is now a very faded flower indeed. Beauty, whose potency resides solely in rose-leaf lips and azure eyes at nineteen, is apt to be of the washed-out or sour type a score of years later on ; above all, when no cheerful ray of soul illumines it from within.”

“ We praise the fair,” runs the proverb, “ according as our own market goes in it.” Lady Violet's market has gone exceedingly ill. Look at the face and figure of the McLagan, as he walks beside her ! And she abhors and contemns that big fair of vanity wherein she had once hoped to drive so splendid a bargain matrimonial. Woe, if Lady Violet come across them, to the young and giddy crowd who still thread its mazes, full of hope for the future, and enjoyment of the present ! Woe, above all, to the reigning beauties of the hour—stars whose up-rising serves but to render the declension of Lady Violet McLagan the more apparent !

Lord Stair has got Leah a little clear of impending danger, but not so clear as to be wholly out of hearing ; and Lady Violet McLagan's voice is at once deliberate and piercing—a voice specially trained, one would say, for the utterance and emphasising of cruel speeches to her weaker sisters.

“ Who is that lady you have been walking about with, mother ? ” she asks brusquely. “ ‘ A Mrs. Chancellor, or Chatterton, or some such name. ’ So I imagined. ‘ And a

friend of Lord Stair's.' So I also imagined. Don't you think you mistake in allowing yourself to be seen in public with these doubtful-looking persons?"

Leah hears every word of the remark as plainly as though it were addressed to her at first hand; hears, and I doubt not will remember in days when Vanity Fair and its jostling crowd, their ambitions and their rebuffs, shall have become to her like the faded pageants of a long-past fever dream.

"And this is my moment of triumph—solid, honourable triumph, Milor," she cries gaily—yes, without a quiver of the lip. "Who could have guessed that the first taste of social success would be so sweet! A duke's widow, under pressure, inviting—or rather, not forbidding—me to appear at her house! A duke's daughter condescending to give an unfavourable criticism on my looks!"

"You must reckon Lady Violet McLagan's adverse criticisms, like Mrs. Baltimore's, as the sincerest flattery," is Lord Stair's answer. "Since the loss of her own beauty—when I was a lad, and you, Mrs. Chamberlayne, were just beginning to run alone, Lady Violet really was a beauty—she has never been able to look another pretty woman in the face."

"I accept the apology in the same philosophic spirit as I did the invitation. Ah, Lord Stair, how much I owe you for all these blushing honours! If my poor papa were but here to witness them."

The world at large does evidently not only witness, but approve. During the next ten minutes Leah receives more gracious smiles from women's lips than have yet been accorded her during her London career. What Mrs. Chamberlayne is, what Mrs. Chamberlayne is likely to become—"Why, my dear friend, with such a husband as hers—quite lost, you know—

and with such an adviser as Lord Stair, *can* any good thing be looked for?—and an adventuress, or scarcely better, I am told, before her marriage. This Colonel Pascal (can any one tell me what regiment Colonel Pascal commanded?) mixed up, they say, in some kind of agency in Paris. Still I am never one to throw the first stone——”

At any one who floats sufficiently to be noticed of duchesses.

As for Hetty Robarts, her newly-aroused charity quite burns for an occasion of making itself practically felt.

“It will be an undoubted duty to ask the Chamberlaynes to dinner, Charles; indeed, the first invitation ought to have come from our house, not theirs. But really there seems a terrible difficulty in deciding whom to get to meet them, does there not?”

“We know a dean, of some kind or another, I believe,” answers Mr. Robarts, with his quiet obtuseness. “Perhaps Mrs. Chamberlayne would not mind, for once, putting up with so humble a dignitary. Still, when one is in the habit of walking about with duchesses——”

“A dean. To be edified by a few of Jack Chamberlayne’s little stories, I hope. You might as well propose at once to extend the party to Mrs. Baltimore.”

“Mrs. Baltimore would be a congenial spirit to invite to meet the Duchess of St. Ives, if we could only soar sufficiently high to make her Grace’s acquaintance.”

“——And what I was thinking was, we might ask Leah to come and dine with us, unceremoniously, this evening. It avoids the necessity, for the time being, of inviting her husband. It gets us out of the difficulty of finding people to meet them——”

“But it involves our committing a mortal rudeness to a

viscount," says Mr. Robarts innocently. "Lord Stair, it is evident, is in attendance for the afternoon upon Mrs. Chamberlayne. How could you have the face to ask her, in his lordship's hearing, to return with us to dinner?"

I must do Henrietta Robarts the justice of saying that at this point she colours somewhat.

"I—I thought perhaps *you* might like to invite Lord Stair as well, Charles, dear," she remarks, with a touching little air of wifely diffidence. "Lord Stair is a most agreeable person when you come to converse with him. He knows a great number of my mamma's old friends——"

"And he calls our cousin's wife by her Christian name! No, no, Henrietta. Do not let your good-heartedness lead you into an action that your conscience might hereafter disapprove. Holding a certain set of strong opinions on Saturday night, how can it possibly be right to invite Lord Stair and Mrs. Chamberlayne to meet each other, at your own table, on Sunday?"

"I don't suppose our inviting, or not inviting them, would make much difference in the end, Charles."

"Ah, I see. The world is wicked, but it does not come within our special province to be the world's reformers. Carry out your charitable intentions by all means, my love. We shall not have a very grand dinner to set before a viscount. Still, if moral considerations are set at rest, it is to be hoped the limited size of the turbot will not signify."

And a few minutes later, Hetty makes her way up to Leah with almost sisterly warmth. So glad to meet her, and looking so well, and such an exquisite dress. But here without Jack? Well, now, for Hetty's part, she considers Jack a very bad boy indeed for taking so little care of his wife. And on a Sunday,

too! Mr. Robarts would no more let her go to the Zoo by herself——”

“Oh, but I have run about by myself ever since I was a small child,” says Leah, with her ready, all-concealing frankness. “Think how I was brought up! Before I was fourteen papa used to send me half over London to buy his cigars and lavender gloves. And then I have Lord Stair; you did not see him? Lord Stair looks after my welfare much more narrowly than Jack would.”

“If I thought Jack would ever forgive me, I should like to carry you off with us to Inverness Road,” cries Hetty. “Charles, would it not be delightful if we could persuade Leah to dine with us to-day, and Lord Stair? Morning dress—oh, my lord, we shall all be in morning dress. I will listen to no excuses. You and I can go in the brougham, Leah, and have a nice long chat together; we positively *ought* to make each other's acquaintance—and Charles will follow with Lord Stair in your carriage.”

Thus does Mrs. Robarts dig her first little trench around her viscount; not without success. The prospect even of a Bayswater dinner seems brighter to Leah, in her present state of mind, than a solitary evening spent with Jack. Lord Stair declares himself to be under Mrs. Chamberlayne's orders in all things. Finally, as the last notes of the national anthem swell through the Gardens, it comes to pass that Hetty is conducted “to our brougham,” trembling with fear lest none of her friends should recognise her, upon the arm of Greatness.

Lenient to the trifling sins of those above us! The good little Pharisee could almost find it in her heart to forgive Bell Baltimore and her diamonds at this moment.

CHAPTER XXX.

A RED-LETTER DAY.

OVER the dinner in Inverness Road we need not linger long.

Mrs. Chamberlayne and Lord Stair are not the only consumers of the limited turbot. Hetty prides herself upon the intellectual flavour of her impromptu Sunday gatherings, and has picked up two hack representatives of the world of pen-and-ink to grace her board to-day; a female fanatic in spectacles, who tortures poor Robarts by discussing the theory of evolution from primordial germs, and a leading funny man of a leading funny paper, who never opens his mouth, save to fill it, from the beginning of the repast to its conclusion.

There are the accustomed cold entrées, and wretched pink champagne, and troupe of babies for dessert; the usual suppressed yawns in the fine, tasteless drawing-room when Hetty treats her guests to second-hand æsthetics, and boarding-school Beethoven after dinner.

To say that one dines with Mrs. Robarts, is to say all these things, without need of expansion. Are there not hundreds of Hettys, in Bayswater and elsewhere, and cannot every reader fill in the outlines of the sketch from dreary personal experience, unaided by shading of mine?

At half-past ten, to a moment, the celebrities, male and female, wish good-night, and start upon their different roads, on foot, by omnibus, by underground rail. It would require a natural historian of the species to say, definitely, how the professional feeder-out makes his way back to his burrow. By the time eleven o'clock strikes, Lord Stair's face, as he sits

behind the piano, turning over the pages of Hetty's symphonies. inspires even his fellow-martyr's heart with pity.

"Your music would be excuse sufficient for one forgetting time and everything belonging to it, Hetty." And, as she speaks, Leah rises from the side of Mrs. Robarts, whose peace of mind she has been steadily undermining throughout the evening. "But if Jack and I have one principle in common—I was nearly saying, if Jack and I have one principle left us—it is on the subject of keeping horses waiting in the night air—Sunday night air, especially. Lord Stair, it goes against my conscience to tear you away from Beethoven, but you know you are under my commands, and duty is duty."

And now occurs a complication, trivial in outward seeming, and yet that is destined to give form and colour to the whole remaining portion of Leah's story. No horses have been kept waiting in the night air; no carriage was ordered to return to Bayswater at all! In accordance with Hetty's plan, the two ladies drove back from the Zoo together in the brougham, Lord Stair and Mr. Robarts in Mrs. Chamberlayne's victoria. Upon Lord Stair, therefore, rests the blame of the oversight, if oversight it be. He does his best to look innocent, expresses remorse, contrition—the fact remains unaltered. No carriage has been ordered, and if Mrs. Chamberlayne intend to get back to Piccadilly to-night, it will be well to see about something without delay—that is Lord Stair's practical suggestion—in the shape of a cab.

"A cab! No, indeed, my lord!" cries Hetty, shocked that a viscount should, in her house, be reduced to utter such a word. "We will send Leah back in our brougham, of course. Theophilus, my dear, ring the bell and bid James order Thomas to bring the brougham round at once."

Theophilus is the eldest Roberts boy, a pattern of his father in face and speech, and, at the age of ten, already seeing through and through the thin veneer of Hetty's character.

"You know you can never have the brougham after church-time on Sundays, mother." All the Roberts children have suppressed little methodical voices like old men. "Thomas says so. And Thomas is screwed. He broke the big dish going down the kitchen stairs." For, alas! in the present inchoate stage of Hetty's grandeur, Thomas, the supercilious coachman, has to do butler at all smaller entertainments. "And cook means to leave."

Mr. Roberts pats his first-born with grim approval on the shoulder; Hetty colours a painful purple from brow to chin. Leah, with the never-failing Pascal tact, declares that a drive in a hansom on a moonlit summer night is just her very highest conception of earthly enjoyment.

"But alone, I mean, without Jack," hesitates poor Hetty, doubtful (in spite of her mamma's refined training) as to whether, in the highest circles, people think, or do not think of the proprieties. "I am sure Charles would never hear—would you, Charles, love—of my entering a public vehicle alone!"

"Ah, but I am the very reverse of alone," says Leah. "Lord Stair is going to enjoy the public vehicle and the moonlight with me. If we find a hansom, we will drive. If we do not find one, we will walk. And, either way, you may be quite sure no one will be in the least tempted to run away with us."

And so the matter is settled. Hetty would fain bid Theophilus order James to order Thomas to get a hansom; but Leah insists upon being allowed to start upon her pilgrimage on foot. The charm of the hansom is its uncertainty. As likely as not

they will be forced to walk the whole way to Piccadilly ; anyhow, if misadventures of an exciting nature *should* befall her, Hetty will be sure to receive intelligence of her fate in the morning papers.

"—And if we had not started when we did, I should have committed some act of desperation," she remarks, five minutes later, to Lord Stair. It is a soft summer night, delicious even in dusty Bayswater, and, arm-in-arm, Mrs. Chamberlayne and Lord Stair are sauntering slowly along, eastward through Queen's Gardens. "As I listened to the classical symphonies, as I looked round the room at the oil paintings of Hetty, and the statuettes of Hetty, and the photographs of Hetty, I felt myself growing rapidly dangerous. A very little more, and I should have begun laying siege to Charles's heart in sheer self-defence."

"A lucky thing for Charles that we left."

"Poor creature ! I don't look upon him as responsible for his actions. Bell Baltimore was right. Hetty, and the babies, and Beethoven, together, have brought Mr. Robarts, little as he knows it, to the verge of ruin."

"And we are to infer that his, that any man's moral equilibrium would be restored by Mrs. Chamberlayne's laying siege to him ?" is Lord Stair's answer.

"Oh, all these things are comparative," says Leah, lightly. "To have siege laid to one by Mrs. Chamberlayne would be a sin some degrees less heinous than wife-murder, would it not ?"

"Difficult to say. I have no wife (happily for the wife) to murder, and I have certainly never had siege laid to me by Mrs. Chamberlayne. If a few people could, quietly and innocently, be put out of the way, and a few other people take their places, the world would be a much pleasanter one to live in than it is."

And, consciously or unconsciously, Lord Stair's arm presses closer upon the delicate little gloved hand that rests there.

"I should have to think that proposition over before I could assent to it," Leah remarks. "If a few people—say, Hetty Robarts—could be quietly put out of the way, and a few other people—say, Leah Chamberlayne—could take their place. . . No, Lord Stair, I like the world infinitely better under the present dispensation, thank you."

"Under the present dispensation," repeats Lord Stair, more as though he were addressing himself than Leah; "loitering in the summer moonlight, and with Mrs. Chamberlayne, for once not in a cruel mood, at one's side! Yes, if such a state of things as this could last, the world would need extremely little reformation to convert it into Utopia, as far as I am concerned."

"Until you got tired of the moonlight and of Mrs. Chamberlayne together! You and I can, we do, support a good deal of each other's conversation, Milor, but always before an audience, always with the dress, or follies, or failures of our dearest friends supplying us with themes. Solitude, and moonlight, and Utopia, would soon exhaust our stock of ideas, depend upon it."

"I don't know that I would mind risking the experiment," says Lord Stair.

For a full minute, or more, Leah does not speak. Her eyes are looking away—far beyond these straight dull rows of London pavement. The whole expression of her face has become serious under the influence of thoughts in which Lord Stair has, and knows he has, no part.

"The elixir of life, the charm of all our best hours, is uncertainty," she cries at last, returning, with a visible effort, to herself and to her companion, "as I remarked to Hetty in respect

of hansom cabs. I am looking well to-day, you say ; I am in high spirits, could laugh—did you hear how I laughed at dinner, even under the dead weight of Hetty and her authors ? Now I will tell you why. To-day, I know, is a turning-point in my life. My fate . . . one cannot reason about these presentiments, one *feels* them . . . trembles in the balance. I am like the gamblers, whose faces I used to watch at Monaco, when they had staked all on the last turn of the cards. Well, and it suits me. My queerly-strung nature thrives best on that sort of desperate excitement."

"About one thing, at least, there is no uncertainty, I hope," says Lord Stair,—“our friendship. Yes, Mrs. Chamberlayne, even after the lesson you read me last night, I have the courage to pronounce that word."

His tone is grave, but as far removed as tone can be from sentiment. The hour, the loneliness, the softened beauty of Leah's upturned face, do not, for an instant, beguile Lord Stair from the path which he has chalked out for his footsteps to follow ; a path leading, he devoutly trusts, to far graver issues than any paltry gratification of vanity, any transient light comedy of conquest. For once Lord Stair's friendship for a woman is in earnest, terrible earnest ; the rehabilitation of his own lost life, the replenishment of his own empty coffers, staked upon its stability.

"Our friendship is, of all mortal relations, the most uncertain," Leah answers, with recovered gaiety of manner. "That is just why we can endure to see each other so often. Any fine morning we may wake and know that we have seen our last. Your marriage, for instance——"

"Is precisely the one catastrophe that cannot happen."

"Every man thinks so—poor Mr. Robarts thought so, depend

upon it—till his hour comes. Now Lady Stair would naturally be some blue-blooded patrician, with eyelids like the Duchess of St. Ives, and a distaste for doubtful-looking persons, like Lady Violet McLagan. And the doubtful-looking persons would not consider it an amusement to associate with her."

"My wife," says Lord Stair, carelessly, "as you insist upon my talking about such a myth—will be some well-gilded Miss Molasses, dug out of the inmost depths of the City. You cannot really imagine, Mrs. Chamberlayne, that I would surrender my liberty from any other motive than starvation? Blue blood, black, yellow, any coloured blood, so long as it were tightly bound up in the great eating interests of the country, would do for me."

"To be sure. I recollect, when you first began my education in Paris, your telling me there were only two reliable instincts in human nature—vanity and hunger. Miss Molasses would marry your lordship from vanity."

"As I should most certainly marry Miss Molasses from hunger, Heaven help Miss Molasses!"

"Heaven help any woman who marries any man," says Leah. "Unless——" Her voice falters.

"Unless it be the man who loves her," finishes Lord Stair. "In which case, Heaven help her the more. She will need it. A man who loves, like these fathers of families, is capable of any crime."

"And men who do not love?"

"Commit indiscretions, no doubt, not crimes. If I loved a woman—I mean," he corrects himself, "if fate ever rendered it possible for me to marry the woman I love—I should torture her with my jealousy. Torture her! As I told you last night."

I believe I would kill her if she looked at any other fellow than myself."

Leah laughs a little uneasily.

"If I am anywhere in the way when you are courting Miss Molasses, it will be my duty to give her a hint or two as to these ferocious dispositions. At the same time, I must say I think you are mistaken, Milor. No crime bigger than what the Duchess of St. Ives calls the '*mauvaise langue*' is in your nature."

"Wait until you see me tried, Mrs. Chamberlayne."

"Until Lady Stair, née Miss Molasses, takes to flirting?"

"Until the one woman the world holds for me, throws my friendship over, Leah."

And something in the tone of Lord Stair's voice conveys to the full as much a warning as a jest.

At the corner of Stanhope Terrace they come upon a cabstand, and then follows their drive, for the most part a silent one, along the outskirts of the moonlit park to Piccadilly. Well, when they have arrived within thirty or forty yards of their destination, suddenly, Leah turns wise; bethinks herself that it would be prudent for Lord Stair to part from her here, rather than at the door of her own hotel. I use the word "wise" relatively. The caprice is about as baseless as that fatal one which prompted her, on the evening of her walk with Danton, to visit the *café chantant* in Paris.

"Don't think that, like John Gilpin's wife, I fear the neighbours," she tells him. "I am really influenced by the dictates of conscience. All Hetty's hints as to inefficient chaperons and public conveyances have come back, with a rush, upon my brain. To return home alone at midnight in a hansom is bad enough;

still, it is just one degree better than to return home at midnight in the same discreditable vehicle, *not* alone."

"I am listening to the first compliment that ever fell to me from your lips," says Lord Stair. "In the wintry days of gout and rheumatism to come, I shall be able to say that once, actually once in her life, Mrs. Chamberlayne regarded me as something of more consequence than a bouquet-holder or a walking-stick."

"Say rather," interrupts Leah, a little coldly, "that for once in her life, Mrs. Chamberlayne's common sense was perverted into fear of Mrs. Grundy by a course of evil companionship! I retract my request, Milor, before it is made. See me home, by all means. If you will, come in and smoke a cigar of forgetfulness with Jack, afterwards."

But the driver has already received his signal through the trap-door in the roof; and before Leah has finished speaking, the hansom has stopped.

"To say good-night, or not, that is the question," cries Lord Stair, pushing back the door and half rising. "Command me, Mrs. Chamberlayne. Am I to go or stay?"

Piccadilly, just at this spot, is in shadow, as regards the moon; but the cab has pulled up in such a position beneath a lamp that the faces of Lord Stair and Leah are in a full blaze of gaslight. A pedestrian, advancing in either direction along the pavement, might recognise them easily, listen, almost, to their conversation, while he retained his own incognito.

"As we have taken the trouble to stop, good-night," says Leah. "Don't carry away my laces with you—thanks; and now, what about this afternoon? It is too late, I suppose, to say, 'to-morrow?'" Lord Stair by this time has got down, and she is bending forth her head to speak to him. "The usual hour, I suppose?"

"The usual hour," answers Lord Stair, with that manner of his that "while saying naught, seems all to say" whenever he addresses a young and pretty woman. "Unless, of course, I receive contrary orders from you, meanwhile."

"Good-night, Milor. Hetty will be disappointed of her sensation paragraph in the papers. The day has been no turning-point in anybody's life, after all."

"It has been a red-letter day in my calendar," is Lord Stair's answer, "for I have spent it with you."

So they part. Lord Stair stands for a moment, an expression that might well be construed into one of triumph round his lips; then, crossing the road, saunters away through Green Park to his quarters in St. James's Street. And Leah returns home—such dreary mockery of a home as she may be said to possess.

The cabman holds out his arm, in its respectable Sunday black, her hand touches it lightly; she springs down, she sees—ah, Heaven, and her heart stops beating—not a dozen yards distant from her in the moonlight, she sees the face of Danton!



CHAPTER XXXI.

GAS-LIGHT IN JUNE.

FOR an instant both involuntarily stand still; their eyes meeting as they met through the chill October darkness on the night when Leah was driving from Bonchrétien's house, a bride, beside Jack Chamberlayne. Then, with deliberation that accents his meaning but too well, M. Danton turns coolly

on his heel and pursues his way ; and no choice remains to Leah but to enter the hotel, with such strength as she may possess, alone.

She walks with heavy limbs, breathless, faltering, up the stairs, and at the door of the drawing-room finds her husband ready to bid her welcome. A smile of suspicious omen is round Jack's lips—a look that his wife knows is in his eyes, and he is perfectly—of Jack Chamberlayne one would be inclined to write unnaturally—sober ; almost the only time Leah has seen him in this condition since that blue Roman morning when he insisted upon mastering the secrets of Deb's letter, six months ago.

“You are late, my dear ; past twelve o'clock.” Thus, with amicable tone, with grim politeness of manner, he receives her. “I was just beginning to speculate as to whether I should give you up finally or not.”

“Give me up ? Why, I have only been dining with the Robertses,” she stammers. “Getting through a duty that I thought you would gladly be spared. And Inverness Road is so far off ; and Hetty gave us so much Beethoven : and oh, Jack, how cruelly hot you keep the rooms—all this gas-light in June ! I declare no breath of air is ever allowed to enter when I am away.”

Which remark yields a pretext for shading her face from the lamps (and from his scrutiny), also for crossing to a window, opening it, and standing there ; while she struggles with all the power of will under her command, at least, for *outward* self-mastery. Vain essay, it would seem. Not a vestige of colour dawns on Leah's cheeks ; her clammy hands tremble ; her heart beats so violently, she feels that Jack has only to approach to hear its beats.

"I shall be better in a minute or two," she falters. "But the truth is, I ran too quickly up the stairs. Dr. Wentworth may be as euphemistic as he likes . . . these fashionable doctors remind one of the French court, at which it was treason to pronounce the word 'death' . . . there *must* be something wrong at twenty years of age in having such a heart as mine."

Mr. Chamberlayne, with ostentatious care, shuts the door, lowers the flaring gas-lights, and comes across the room to his wife's side.

"You are looking pale, Leah, upset, I should say—if there could have been anything to upset you at the Robartses—but deuced handsome all the same. Stupid thing, I know, for a man to pay compliments to his own wife ; but even a husband cannot help having eyes. Oh, come, you should not bear malice," for she has drawn away, with involuntary shrinking, from his tone. "I have been thinking over the little duel we had last night, and I am ready to allow I was wrong. Can a fellow be held to the letter of what he says at three o'clock in the morning ? You don't refuse to be friends, I suppose ?"

But close though he stands to her, he never holds out his hand : his haggard face, despite its smiles, remains cold as ice. And still there is a look of which Leah has knowledge in his eyes.

"When did I ever bear malice, Jack ?" As she speaks, Leah is sensible of astonishment—not that the voice she hears is unlike, but rather that it should resemble, ever so distantly, her own. "I refuse to be friends, who never sought to quarrel. Why, if it rested with me——"

"Everything in our joint lives would go smooth and pleasantly, I am sure," he interrupts, with cynical readiness. "It is my temper, my confounded unreasonable temper, that does

the mischief. Well, we must hope better things for the future, Leah. There is no undoing the past for either of us, and there is no good regretting circumstances that regret can't alter; but perhaps it is not too late to turn over a new leaf yet. Will you sit down?" Pushing over an easy-chair as he speaks to his wife's side. "Or are you too much engrossed with the objects of extraordinary interest to be seen in Piccadilly?"

"A London street on a Sunday night is such a lively spectacle at all times," replies Leah, accepting his unwonted gallantry with as natural a manner as she can command. "Still, Piccadilly is Piccadilly, not Inverness Road. I am anxious to do my duty, Jack, as I have shown to-day, but I must confess that four consecutive hours of relations, and relations like Hetty, are beyond my strength."

Jack on this draws up another chair, in which he seats himself: so adjusting his position that his eyes are upon a direct mathematical level with his wife's.

"You did not go straight to Inverness Road when you first left this house, I believe."

He makes the remark less in the tone of a question than an assertion.

"When I first left this house I went to Curzon Street," answers Leah, promptly. Her courage by this time has come back to her—nay, has redoubled, as men's strength has been observed to do, after a morbid fashion, under the influence of strong bodily pain. "You have seen Bell Baltimore . . . No? I thought you and Bell were in the habit of paying each other Sunday visits? Oh, Jack, and I committed such a crime—drew back a rose-coloured curtain and let the sun shine full on one of poor Bell's best morning complexions! My dear, all that the sanitary people tell us about keeping open the pores of the skin

must be nonsense. Mrs. Baltimore is at least so thick in artificial coating ;" Leah measures off an inappreciable portion of an inch upon the tip of one slender gloved finger. "And still she lives."

Mr. Chamberlayne extends his two hands wide.

"And if Mrs. Baltimore were as thick as *that* in paste and paint, a great deal it would matter to me, would it not? Your cousin is about as true as the rest of the family, I suppose—complexion, heart, soul, everything."

"Ah, Jack, and I used to look upon you as one of the few men living who believed in poor Bell!"

"I have no belief in any women," says Mr. Chamberlayne, with characteristic frankness. "For certain, not in the class that inhabit smart houses in Curzon Street. One does meet with honesty sometimes among the people the rest of the world won't shake hands with. But I always knew," he goes on, "how long our friendship for Bell Baltimore was likely to last. She has served our purpose, I conclude; has got, or has not got us as many invitations as we expected. Now let her go, before her friendship or herself become inconvenient."

His tone is even more offensive than his words; but not a shade of colour deepens on his wife's cheek.

"The wind must be in the east," she remarks, quietly. "Nothing else could account for the general temper of the world to-day. Why, only think, Jack! among other unkind things, Bell pronounced my dress, which even Hetty Roberts had the civility to like, atrocious. You appreciate it, I hope, Mr. Chamberlayne, do you not?"

And standing up for a minute, Leah arranges her silken draperies to the best effect, then holds her well-poised head gracefully aloft for Jack's inspection.

He looks at her with an expression, evenly mixed, of admiration and hatred, an expression such as I believe no human face save that of a passionately jealous man ever wears.

"Appreciate? Yes, I do that, thoroughly, the dress and the wearer alike. Pray what other 'appreciators' besides Hetty Roberts and myself have you had to-day?"

Leah takes off her gloves, folds them into a little ball which she tosses on a neighbouring table, and begins to reckon on her fingers. Her master, it would seem, is bent upon her acting the farce out to the end. As well play her part with spirit! Jingle the bells gaily—how many hired jesters have had to do the same—although every sound they make sinks like a knell upon her heart!

"You would like a list of my appreciators—or rather the appreciators of M. Worth. I take very little credit to myself in these matters. Well, Lord Stair first, of course——"

"Lord Stair first, of course!"

Jack pushes out his feet, folds his arms, and puts on an air of jocosity that becomes himself and the occasion ill.

"And Mr. Roberts, equally of course—I can tell you that I am very proud of my conquest over your cousin—and the usual foolish crowd of flutterers, young and old, at the Zoo. After I had left Bell's house I drove to the Zoo, you know."

"I did not know it, my dear, until you had the goodness to inform me of the fact."

"Well, the afternoon had to be slaughtered, and the Zoo seemed as promising a means as any other. And Lord Stair met me there——"

"Naturally."

"And introduced me . . . to whom do you think? I will

give you three, I will give you thirty guesses, and you will never come right."

"To Lady Jane Fuller, very likely."

Lady Jane Fuller is about the fastest visited woman in London; probably one of the fastest women of any class in Europe. And Jack's tone infuses treble venom into the suggestion. But still Leah takes no offence. A man treading the path to the scaffold would scarcely be sensitive as to the rough stones or briar-pricks he might encounter upon the way.

"Lord Stair introduced me to some one fifty times bigger and more notorious than Lady Jane Fuller. You and I know a duchess, Jack. Her Grace of St. Ives allowed me to walk beside her parasol the whole length of the lawn at the Zoological, Lord Stair says, talked to me; but I must confess I think *that* embroidery. At all events, we are invited to a ball at the ducal residence on the thirtieth."

Mr. Chamberlayne's face shows no gratification at the news. Let us credit even Jack with the scanty virtues he possesses. Although his father was a woolstapler, he cares not a straw for all the titles in London—would sooner walk down Regent Street with a strolling actor than a prince, provided the strolling actor were of tastes more congenial to his own.

"The thirtieth," he remarks, sullenly. "And pray what authority have you to accept any invitation for me? Who told you that I mean to remain in town until the thirtieth?"

"Nothing would please me better than to go away," is Leah's answer. "I said so to you last night, but you did not seem inclined to take me at my word."

"Last night is not to-day. A great many unexpected things may have sprung to life during the last twenty-four hours—

your affection for Hetty Robarts, for instance. After leaving the Zoological, you tell me, you spent the remainder of the evening at Bayswater?"

And now Leah, for the first time, perceives the drift of his questions. She is not playing out a farce, but undergoing an inquisition.

"The question appears to require a deal of thinking over," repeats Jack; "yet I should have thought it was put in plain enough language. After leaving the Zoo, you spent the remainder of the day at Bayswater?"

"I went back with the Robartses to dinner, as I told you. Hetty must have seen me walking with the Duchess, I conclude, or possibly Lord Stair was the attraction, for she asked Lord Stair as well. And we met a celebrated funny man who was not funny at all, and a creature in spectacles who declared herself to be lineally descended from lichens, casual germs, sparks, protoplasms, and gorillas."

"And after you left the Robartses?" persists Jack, with never a smile upon his lips. "You had got conveniently rid of the carriage and servants, I know—don't think I want to lay a trap for you. The carriage was dismissed between six and seven o'clock this afternoon."

But now the blood leaps up, with one hot blaze, into Leah's face.

"If you have been questioning the servants, pray pursue the same plan still," she exclaims. "Ask Mr. and Mrs. Robarts at what time I left their house, and under what circumstances. You see the hour at which I arrived here"—she glances across his shoulder at a time-piece—"and can form any conclusion respecting my actions that suits you best."

But Jack is no more swayed by her warmth than

indifference. A man lightly jealous may be lightly shamed out of his suspicions ; not so one in whom jealousy has grown to be an integral portion of existence—bone of his bone, flesh of his flesh, till death them shall part.

“ I would question my servants ”—she notes a marked emphasis on the word ‘ my ’—“ or Mr. Robarts, or any other person with whom I am acquainted, if it served my purpose to do so. Of that you may be sure. At present it is my pleasure to question you, only. After you left the Robartses’ house you returned here alone at midnight in a hansom ? ”

“ Lord Stair was with me. It was better surely, at such an hour, to have Lord Stair’s escort than none ? ”

“ You are a fitter judge than I can be on that point. Let us keep to facts, not to questions of expediency. Lord Stair came with you in a hansom, you say, from Charles Robarts’s house to this hotel ? ”

“ If you insist upon having the narrative in detail, you shall have it. Only,” and Leah yawns piteously, “ it is getting late on Monday morning, and the narrative, like the occurrences of which it treats, is so stupid ! When we started from the Robartses’ house we walked. Hansoms, it appears, do not reside in the neighbourhood of Inverness Road ; and you know, ever since the small-pox panic, I will not enter a four-wheeler on principle——”

Between his teeth, Jack Chamberlayne gives utterance to a malediction, comprehensive and deep, on *all* principles.

“ So we were obliged to proceed on foot as far as Uxbridge Road—stay, let me be accurate to a hair’s breadth—the corner of Stanhope Terrace. There we found a hansom, and drove back, the moon shining bright, along Hyde Park Terrace, Connaught Place, and through Park Lane to Piccadilly.”

"Straight to the door of this hotel?"

"No. When we were about fifty yards distant, just by that great Italian warehouse, you remember——"

"I remember nothing but what you choose to recall to me."

"I was weak enough to feel frightened; not, of course, of you, Jack—how could you possibly be angry with me?—but of the other people in the hotel—the servants. I don't rightly know what I was frightened at. At all events, I bade Lord Stair good-night, then and there, set him down, and drove on to this house by myself."

After her confession comes silence, broken at the end of another minute by Jack's voice, harsh and tremulous with barely-repressed passion.

"I don't think much of oaths at the best of times—women's oaths especially—yet I can hardly believe you would perjure yourself for such a bagatelle as this. Will you declare to me, solemnly, that every word you have just uttered is true?"

The muscles of his miserable face work with agitation; his lips are bloodless. Impossible for Jack Chamberlayne to dissemble long; the best or the worst of the man—the worst especially—you must *see*. No acting, no jingling of the bells, for more than a minute together with poor Jack!

"You are a boy, my dear, and a very foolish one," says Leah, gently. "What object could I have in not telling you the truth about the spending of a very dull Sunday? I committed an error, if you like, in not remembering to order the carriage; and my dinner at the Robartses, and my little bit of fancied grandeur at the Zoo, may—as I had no special leave of absence from you—have been errors likewise. Still, whatever misdeeds I may be guilty of, you must admit that my present prostrate condition more than atones for them."

And she rises, and with a tired, slow step, turns round in the direction of the outer door, and away from Jack.

With a movement like lightning he has intercepted her escape, has grasped her roughly by the wrist.

"And you think, after the conversation we had last night, I am going to rest satisfied so easily—to be gulled by witty small-talk about duchesses, lichens, and gorillas? Answer me one thing, Mrs. Chamberlayne; have you, or have you not, seen M. Danton—the only man in this desolate world you can call a friend—to-day? And answer truly. Take the soundest advice that has ever been given you in your life yet, and answer truly."

His eyes have a cruel light in them, like those of some savage animal; the foam stands upon his lips. And Leah turns cold with terror.

I have spoken of her moral nature as born again, purged in the fire of repentance over forfeited love. I have said that, with newly-opened eyes, she beholds things in the outward as in the spiritual world to which, in the old days of narrow self-absorption, she was blind—among others, the beauty of truth. But, physically, Leah is weak as ever. How should a morbidly-strung set of nerves, a defective circulation, improve under the thousand poisonous influences of a London season? And prevarication occurs to her at this moment by the working of a law as potent as that which causes the hare to double, or the poor little hard-hunted beetle to dissemble death.

"The wives of merciless savages," says a writer on the genesis of our race, "must have prospered in nice proportion to their power of disguising their feelings, of interpreting, and so escaping, the rising passions of their husbands. Hence, from the perpetual exercise of this power and the survival of those

having most of it, we may infer its establishment as a feminine faculty."

Gentlemen who employ force in the regulation of their household affairs would do wisely to ponder over the meaning these words contain.

"I don't know what you are talking about, Jack. M. Danton—is he not in Paris? I think you are choosing a strange time for such a jest. 'Have I seen M. Danton to-day?' What in the world can have put such an idea into your head?"

And she laughs, about as naturally as Fatima may have done when she was nerving herself to return the guilt-stained keys to her lord.

"You would like to know, would you?" cries Bluebeard. "Well, I will tell you. Your own fine show of candour put it there. While you have been running about the town with my Lord Stair—degrading yourself and me in pursuit of duchesses and their invitations—I have been quietly sitting at home thinking over the little confidences you reposed in me last night. 'M. Danton coming to London, or so you fancied you had been told, and we must consider what kind of hospitality we should show him on his arrival.' The fellow is here *now*. My common sense tells me he is, but you had not the honesty to say so. Oh, you will not go yet," for she has made a faint attempt to free her wrist from his grasp. "We will not wish each other good-night until you have answered my question, and on oath, mind. You have prejudices—no wonder!—against oaths, as you told me that morning in Rome. Oaths may remind one, with unpleasant force, of perjuries. Still, we must all of us perform duties sometimes that jar upon the taste. On your oath, have you, or have you not, spoken to your old sweetheart to-day?"

Spoken! Yes; sharpened though Jack's intelligence may be by passion, he is no lawyer; and in this unwitting substitution of one word for another, Leah sees a loophole whereby to escape, without injury to conscience, from his cross-examination.

"If by my old sweetheart, and he was never that, you mean M. Danton, I declare to you, most solemnly, that I have never spoken to M. Danton since our wedding-day. I am not very sure that I spoke to him then."

"I wish you to take your oath, if you please. Solemn declarations go for nothing where a woman is concerned."

"If I intended to deceive you at all, I certainly should not care much about the pattern of the deceit," says Leah. "A declaration or an oath would be just the same to me. Oh, Jack, have pity! Your hands are stronger than mine, remember," glancing down with a piteous little sigh at the slender wrist that his cold fingers imprison so cruelly.

He looks at her doggedly, ferociously; measuring, as far as his capacities allow, their respective strength—realizing, it may be, how immeasurably he is the weaker in any conflict where muscles do *not* avail.

"On your solemn oath, before Heaven, you assert that you have never spoken to Danton since the day you married me?"

"On my oath, as you insist upon so many useless forms, I assert that I have never spoken to M. Danton since the day I married you."

"And have received no communication from him?"

"None; unless you call two or three dead violets"—and Leah's face turns to marble—"you ground them under your heel that morning in Rome, you recollect—a communication."

"Ah!"

Profoundest incredulity, rather than any sense of relief, is conveyed by this monosyllable. However, Jack loosens his hold upon his wife's wrist; he turns sullenly away. Believe her or not, nothing more than an oath can he by possibility extract from Leah in her present mood; and that marble hue that has newly overspread her face is one Mr. Chamberlayne likes ill.

"And now, if the inquisition is over, I suppose I may go?" she asks him placidly. "Sunday is a strain upon one's nerves always, but to-day, what with the Zoo, and the Duchess, and Hetty and her authors——"

"You may go to —— for anything I care," shrieks her lord, in his piercing falsetto. "As to my inquisition, as you have the good taste to call it, I may as well remind you, perhaps, of one more fact before we separate. If you have deceived me, if there is any reading between the lines in that oath of yours, you have forsworn yourself, as far as I am concerned, for the last time. Speak to that scoundrel Danton, hear from him, see him, and you know the rest. The same roof does not shelter us for another twelve hours."

Leah looks at her husband steadily while he pronounces his ultimatum, then she smiles.

"You said the same thing to me last night, my dear Jack, and it really is not a pretty thing to have to listen to. Please don't repeat it so often. I am gifted by nature with a fair memory, and, you may be sure, am not likely to forget any of your friendly hints."

And then she makes him a little reverence—for Leah is her father's daughter in this, that she forgets outward courtesy seldom—and goes away, to commune with her own heart, and in her chamber, and be still.

CHAPTER XXXII.

SWEETS FROM LORD STAIR.

IN the good old days of chivalry, domestic dramas like the one whose course we are following, were apt to be comprised in a single act. A difference of opinion this evening : by to-morrow's light the dagger or bowl, with short shrift to the victim, and no embarrassing after-results as regarded the victor's status in society.

Such rude lynch justice has of course disappeared amidst the refinements of a higher civilization. Our nineteenth century Bluebeard may take his wife by the throat over night ; on the following morning may set well-trained eyes to watch her comings and goings ; but none the less will he be seen with her in the park that afternoon in a smart new clarence, perhaps his last attention to Mrs. Bluebeard, and with a rosebud or lily adjusted by Fatima's own fair fingers, in his button-hole.

Mr. and Mrs. Chamberlayne meet at their late breakfast on Monday morning. They drive down to Hurlingham, happily relieved by Lord Stair's society after luncheon, in outward seeming as united a domestic trio as any other in Vanity's great fair. They even show—rare occurrence—in the same theatre-box at night. And so things go on the next day, and the next : the breach between man and wife hourly widening, but the world perceiving no sign thereof, nay, some members of the world actually beginning to speak with hope of the young couple's prospects—"Jack Chamberlayne returning to such

small senses as he may possess at last, or Mrs. Chamberlayne, who has never lost her senses at all, keeping her eyes with increased steadiness upon the hundred thousand pounds of the future." What are the probabilities, as matters stand, of Chamberlayne living to inherit? What the after-probabilities of his widow re-marrying in a twelvemonth, and *whom*? Men learned in the logic of chance make bets on the subject; some even going so far as to offer odds as to the double event.

To Leah it is the time most fraught with suffering of her whole existence. Not for fear's sake alone. She has grown to dread her husband with a terror that saps her strength like real bodily disease; the thought of his possible violence—not merely to herself—pursues her day and night. The cruel, weak face, the eyes with that red light in them, follow her from park to theatre, from theatre to ball. She shudders at his footsteps; starts from such uncertain snatches of sleep as the racket of her lot allows, bathed in cold sweats, or crying upon the name she never utters in her waking hours, to save her.

But this physical terror, this constant haunting sense of coming evil, is not all. She is crushed beneath a new and burning form of self-abasement: sickens under the knowledge that Danton is in London, breathes the same air that she breathes, treads the same streets, is shone on by the same mocking June sunshine, yet despises herself and the life to which she has sunk too much to seek to aid her. For him to stay away may be her salvation; but hearts mortally stricken are apt to be illogical, and salvation so bought seems blacker than the lowest depth of despair. And she would be content with so little. Let him leave a formal card at her hotel, send her a message through Deb (more than once she knows he has

gone to visit Deb at Ramsgate) ; give a single sign of interest in her fate, or forgiveness of the past, and she would ask no more. And still the days wear on ; the day of the Duchess of St. Ives' ball draws near, and she hears, sees nothing of him.

Lord Stair, an habitual finder-out, by tortuous means, of other men's movements, has ascertained long ago the fact of Danton's arrival in London, and at well-chosen seasons, with language whose delicate framing precludes the possibility of offence, speaks of him to Leah. Has M. Danton become proud ; does his hospital work so engross him that he cannot remember his old friends of the Rue Castiglione ; or is it Madame Danton—Leah, of course has not forgotten Mr. Pettingall's legend on that theme—who occupies his thoughts ? The wife dead—ah ! then so much is lessened of the mystery. Danton is prosecuting some new love affair—the kind of fellow who could no more support life's burthen without a love affair than without a cigarette between his lips. And we know how much leisure a man in love has for friendship ! With other suggestions of a like kind ; suggestions which in spite of herself compel Leah's attention, set her thinking when she is alone, on graver subjects than the outside carelessness of the words would seem to justify.

A fair sprinkling of human follies are committed, doubtless, under the influence of passion—a large number out of imagined self-interest. An overwhelming proportion, I would say, take their birth from precisely the state of feverish moral unrest to which Leah Chamberlayne has sunk—a state in which *any* movement seems preferable to the torture of enforced inaction—*any* outward support, no matter the hand from which it comes, worth clutching at.

She has been smitten by an incurable wound that she will carry to her death-bed ; the man who once loved her, and whom she injured, has taken the cruelest of all reprisals—neglect. Lord Stair never neglects her for a day, an hour. Her husband is indifferent to her—parades his worse than indifference before the world. Lord Stair is willing to throw over the world for her sake—givers of entertainments, not a few, begin to see that it is vain to invite his lordship to their houses, unless the name of Mrs. Chamberlayne be on their visiting lists. Attentive to every trifle that can yield her interest, forestalling her smallest wishes, never overstepping the boundary-line of friendship, and yet contriving to show, without becoming ridiculous by the demonstration, how painful are the restraints he has laid upon himself, how can Lord Stair fail to become the strongest influence of Leah's life? She fears him, yet looks to him as a defence against her fears, loves him little as ever, yet in his society finds her readiest means of forgetting love and all that she has lost with it. In a word, she needs him—needs *something*, I should rather say, being human, beyond, stronger than her own worn-out heart, her own chafing conscience—and this something, by unhappy accident, is Lord Stair.

"And if I saw as other people see," Jack remarks to her, with his usual candour, "you and Lord Stair would probably never open your lips to each other again. But I am not quite so weak, even under the influence of the finest amateur acting in London, as to mistake the blind for the reality."

The evening of the long-looked-for thirtieth has arrived at last, and Deb Pascal is seated at dessert with Mr. and Mrs. Chamberlayne. Aunt Hepzibah is staying for a couple of days in town on business, and Deb, ecstatically happy, has spent the afternoon with Leah. No restraint is the child's presence upon

Mr. Chamberlayne's freedom of speech. Lord Stair *and his friendship*; well whitewashed duchesses, their character, the honour conferred by their patronage; husbands, wives, and the universal misery of marriage—on all these subjects has Jack been holding forth, with perfectly unchecked warmth and trenchancy during dinner; Deb, her eyes wide open, following, as far as her keen child's intelligence and fair child's soul can be said to "follow" such a preacher on such themes.

"Lord Stair has grown generous in his old age, Jack. He gave me a great big paper of sugar-plums when he called to-day; and do you know what I did as soon as Leah and I were alone in the Park? I threw them, not where other children could pick them up, but so that I might see the wheels of the carriages *scrunch* over them. Sweets from Lord Stair! How could I tell they were not filled with nice little doses of prussic acid or strychnine, instead of liqueur?"

Jack heaps the child's plate approvingly with sweetmeats from a neighbouring dish, remarking, as he does so, that she is at full liberty to throw them through the window, if she has doubts as to the honourableness of his intentions.

"Oh, Jack Chamberlayne and Lord Stair would never go the same way to work about anything—even about poisoning one," says Deb, promptly. "As I flung away Milor's bonbons, I am quite safe in eating Jack's—don't you think so, Leah?"

"I think that you have not the virtue of gratitude, Deb," is Leah's answer. "Do you know how long it has taken you to decide whether you will, or will not, look upon Lord Stair as an ogre? Rather more than eight months, my dear. You made his acquaintance at Madame Bonchrétien's, the end of last September. It is now June, and——"

"And the child is honest, keeps to her first impressions, as I do to mine," interrupts Mr. Chamberlayne. "I considered, and told you, in Paris, that Lord Stair was too much your companion for your own good, and said a great deal more to you than you ought to listen to. I think so still—only with a difference. What that difference is, I leave to you to guess."

"Why, to be sure, Leah is married now!" cries Deb; poor Debbie, longing to be peace-maker, yet hesitating on which side to throw in the weight of her small influence. "Lord Stair couldn't win Leah away from you now, if he tried ever so, Jack."

"Of course not, my dear," says Jack, with grotesque amiability. "Once married, and a wife's heart becomes her husband's property for life, does it not, Deb?"

"I am sure no one's heart could ever belong to Lord Stair," Deb answers, not inappositely.

For a little space Leah remains silent after the child's remark. Then she rises from the table, she crosses, as if under the sway of some sudden impulse, to her husband's side.

"Jack, I wonder whether there is any earthly consideration, any bribe I could offer, that would make you come with me to the ball to-night? I suppose not. You have always engagements of your own, now."

And she rests her hand—a fevered, trembling hand it is—upon his shoulder.

"Yes; we each choose our own way free enough," says Jack but he hangs his head, he does not lift his eyes to his wife's. "As to my going with you to-night, the request is an absurdity. A vast deal you need the presence of a husband, among all your fine viscounts and duchesses."

"I need you awfully," she answers, "as I never needed

thing in my life before. I—I am turning giddy, I believe, as one does at a great height. I remember feeling so that November day we climbed to the top of Milan Cathedral. I want a hand to steady me. That hand ought to be yours."

At this Jack Chamberlayne raises his head, and stares at his wife, fairly bewildered. His eyes are glazed with wine, no doubt; when are they not so glazed? His perceptions, at no time bright, do not discern the strange eagerness of her expression—the intensity that gives such pathos to her voice.

"Milan Cathedral! It would be better taste in you, I think, not to allude to that cursed Italian tour of ours, before the child, at all events. How the dickens am I to know what you are driving at by Milan Cathedral? If you feel giddy, as you call it, it will be in the middle of a waltz, I suppose. You will have my Lord Stair's arm to steady you."

"Don't talk so much of Lord Stair," she cries, with a shudder. "Take me, just for once, to be sincere, and talk of ourselves. I want you, and no one in the world but you, to be my escort to-night. Come, I don't often ask you a favour, and this"—she attempts to smile, but fails—"is not such a disagreeable one to fulfil. I don't look uglier than usual, do I, Deb?" And Leah retreats a step, in order that her husband may the better view her in her shining beauty. She has planned to go to the opera on her road, so is in her ball-dress already, a white dress, like a bride's, with diamonds gleaming from her hair, and on her throat and wrists. "Jack would have no great cause to feel ashamed when he entered the Duchess's ball-room, with me upon his arm?"

"Ashamed!" cries Debbie, jumping up, and making little circuits of admiration round Leah's flowing skirts. "I should rather say not! I am sure Jack will be the proudest

in London if he only goes with you to the ball to-night, Leah."

"You are thinking of fairy princes and their brides, child," remarks Leah. "People are not proud of each other, out of story books, now-a-days."

"People, out of story-books, must consider how much they have got to be proud of," says Jack Chamberlayne, in his querulous voice. "To my mind, a man whose father was a woolstapler can have no particular cause for pride in rising, through his wife's good looks, to a class above his own. I, at least, do not intend to put myself in such a position. 'Mr. Chamberlayne—and who is Mr. Chamberlayne?' asks one impertinent eye-glassed idiot of the other. 'Ah—I understand. The husband of Mrs. Chamberlayne, *the* Mrs. Chamberlayne! Who is permitted, on sufferance, to mingle with the Duchess of St. Ives's guests, through Lord Stair's influence.'"

"Say one word, Jack, in good hearty earnest, and I will give up the ball with pleasure, and the Duchess too."

"And Lord Stair into the bargain, and all *your other conquests* with him."

At the intonation of his voice Leah turns sharply aside, a flush of the old passionate colour rising to her cheek. Then her emotion, whatever may have been its source, dies away, and she rests her hand again on Jack's arm; she makes her final appeal to him.

"Grant me this one favour, perhaps the last I may ever ask of you. Come with me! You are dressed already." Contrary to his habit, Mr. Chamberlayne has dined in elaborate evening dress. "It would cost you no more trouble to come than to stay away."

"No; and you look so nice, dear Jack," cries Deb, tremu-

lously, for though she has sufficient feminine insight to know that a compliment can seldom be misplaced, the child cannot but mark the growing sullenness of dear Jack's face. "Such beautiful embroidery," stroking the front of his shirt with her small fingers, "and enamelled studs, and a flower, even, in your button-hole."

Jack pushes her roughly aside. "I'm not in a humour for all this fooling," he exclaims. "You are learning to be a woman too fast, Miss Pascal, learning to cajole and flatter and be false, like the rest. As to going with you," addressing himself to Leah, "the thing is impossible, even if I wished it, and I don't wish it. I am engaged to an evening party, as it is."

"To an evening party, Jack—you!"

"To an evening party, Mrs. Chamberlayne—me! You have your engagements, I mine. And as far as respectability goes," cries Jack, with his hollow, spiritless laugh, "I would back one society against the other, any day—Lady Violets, Dowager-Duchesses, Earls, Viscounts, and the rest of the quality included."

"Aunt Hepzibah says the Duchess is not respectable at all," observes Deb, undaunted by her former failure. It is not in Deb's nature to remain a neutral spectator of any conflict, and her acute child's instinct tells her—how, or why, Deb would be at a loss to explain—that she best espouses Leah's cause by ranging herself against the "quality," and on the side of Jack. "Aunt Hepzibah knows all the histories of high people, because Uncle Nathan used to lend them money, and when I told her Leah was invited to the great Duchess of St. Ives', she said I might as well hold my tongue about that, for that the Duchess was no respectabler than she need be. A bird of the same feather—I'm sure she must be a pretty Duchess, if that is true—as Lord Stair."

Leah's face has become whiter and whiter; its expression

more fixed. Unheeding Deb's chatter, she stands at her husband's side, still watching him steadfastly.

"One hears—in the old days I used to read—of repentance at the eleventh hour, Jack. This may be the eleventh hour for you and me. There may be time for repentance yet. My going out to-night can do no one any good—can yours?"

"I left off thinking of 'good,' one morning in Rome, Mrs. Chamberlayne," is his answer, promptly given. "My going out to-night may amuse me, possibly, and staying at home could only drive me desperate. However this may be, I mean to go."

"Come to the opera first, show yourself with me for once, and go to your own engagements afterwards."

Jack starts from his chair, with an oath that makes little Deb cower away, terror-stricken.

"Be seen with you for once! I know too well what that means," he exclaims. "A husband who is seen as the companion of his wife's frivolities is held by the world to countenance them. I have not sunk to that yet. If you had chosen," he goes on, "yes, even since we came back to London, things might have been different. You had only to do your duty, to promise solemnly never to speak again to an acquaintance of whom I disapproved, and I would have been your companion where and as often as you liked."

For a moment Leah hesitates, as though she were struggling with herself for mastery, then she turns quietly away from him. "It was a promise you had no right to exact." This she says with a certain sad dignity, unrecognised by Mr. Chamberlayne. "Either I was worthy of all your belief or of none! Why will you persist in harping always on that string? The person . . . of whom you speak"—her lips can never approach the mention

of Danton's name without a quiver—"he has passed for ever out of your life and out of mine."

"And Lord Stair has no rival! I congratulate Lord Stair upon his good fortune."

They are the blackest words that ever issued from Jack Chamberlayne's mouth. It may be that he is himself sensible of their blackness, for he quits the room without another look in the direction of his wife's face—a couple of minutes later is driving away as fast as a hansom cab can bear him from the hotel.

"Debbie," says Leah, holding forth her hands to her sister, "you have had but a sorrowful treat, child, and I meant to-day to have been one of pleasure to you. But Jack has a hasty temper, and I am afraid I don't quite understand how to conciliate him. You need not think the fault lies on his side, not even if some day you hear people say so. Jack might have been a very different person if he had not married me."

"And what might you have been if you had not married Jack?" says Deb, keeping her tears back bravely, lest they should fall on Leah's ball dress, but with a look of pain that betokens more than tears in her deep eyes. "I don't want to say anything against Jack, now he is my brother-in-law; and I think he does *right* to hate Lord Stair; but if, long ago, before ever you met him, you had known Danton——"

"Hush, Debbie—hush!" says Leah, turning her bloodless face from the child's gaze. "The past is done with, my dear; those Paris days just as much as the old times—do you remember them?—when we used to plan to turn gipsies, you and I and Naomi, and live among the woods and commons, away from debts, and money, and papa! Well, and we must make the best we can of the present. I have a good deal to be thankful for."

Jack has been very generous to me, and to all of us, and . . . and I think you must not stay with me any longer to-night, Deb," she interrupts herself, with a tremble in her voice that Deb hereafter remembers. "Hannah has been waiting since before dinner, and you know what Aunt Hepzibah's principles are about late hours and dissipation."

Aunt Hepzibah puts up at a commercial inn close to St. Paul's. So, in the company of the old servant, the child has a three-mile drive through the lighted streets before her—a prospect impossible for Deb's mind to contemplate without brightening. "I have enjoyed everything in my day," she cries, throwing her arms around Leah's neck, "except a certain person's sweets, and I am not afraid of poor Jack—only when he swears very loud. Give Jack my love to-morrow morning, if he will take it; and Leah—there is just one thing I want you to say before I go: tell me that the bouquet on your dressing-table does not come from Lord Stair? I asked Melanie, but she only shook her head and looked wise. And I know—I know," says Deb, with jealous wistfulness, "that it must be from some one who has learnt how to *flatter* you cleverly; for all the flowers you like—white violets, Gloire de Dijon roses—all are in it. Don't wear that bouquet to-night, Leah, if it came from Lord Stair!"

But Leah does not, or will not, hear the request. She busies herself in putting on Deb's hat and jacket; begins messages, which she does not remember to finish, to Aunt Hepzibah; talks of coming down soon to Ramsgate and having a long afternoon, she and Deb together, shell hunting. And then, when the time for parting comes, her courage seems abruptly to forsake her. She clasps her cold hands together, stands for a moment irresolute; finally, with disregard of tulle and flounces, sinks down at the child's side, and rests her cheek against hers,

as she was wont to do before her marriage—in the times when Deb was sick and suffering, she the comforter.

“My dear,” she whispers, very low, bringing out each syllable with effort, “do you remember to say your prayers at night, like you used?”

Debbie lifts her head in simple amazement at such a question. “Say my prayers? Yes, indeed, I say them, Leah—morning and evening, without missing. Of course, now I am living in a hotel,” adds Deb, rigidly truthful in the smallest detail, “they may be ever so little shorter than they are at Ramsgate. I can’t get my prayers so well together, here in London, as I can at home.”

“Say a prayer for me, to-night,” Leah falters, with a sob. “I need it.”



CHAPTER XXXIII.

A WHISPER IN THE CROWD.

I HAVE shown elsewhere that the devotion, tender and true, of Lord Stair to Mrs. Chamberlayne is based upon securer grounds than those of sentiment or vanity; that the rehabilitation of his own lost life, the replenishment of his own empty coffers, are in reality staked upon its continuance.

But I am far from saying that Lord Stair’s conscience—that exercise of reason which he, in his language, would term the “highest prudential motive”—has ever admitted to himself the actual nature of his hopes.

Few men, save in the soliloquies of the stage, utter their cherished designs aloud; and ignoble purposes, like many other

ugly things, lose half their deformity so long as they are permitted to remain abstractions. Mrs. Chamberlayne's is the prettiest face of the season. What wonder, his forty years notwithstanding, that he should surrender himself to the credulous enjoyment of her smiles? And Jack, good, honest little lad, bears about with him a forfeited life—with *that* fact can neither the baseness nor the nobility of friends have aught to say. Jack's days, poor fellow, are numbered! A hundred thousand pounds will be his widow's dowry; and he, Lord Stair, accidentally possesses knowledge which 'tis wise and delicate policy to keep secret.

As much as this Lord Stair, the man of the world, may have conceded to Lord Stair, the Iago, in those still moments when the Two Voices make themselves heard in the worst as in the best of us—no more. And still do the risks and uncertainties of his position fret him, keep him from sleeping—on one or two occasions positively interfere with his capacity for dinner. The veteran Lothario, for the first time in his life, hard hit, say those of his acquaintance who know him best; and with reason! For it is the first time in Lothario's life that his chances of ruling a woman's will and of becoming master over a hundred thousand pounds have been united.

So when, from his place in the stalls, he watches Mrs. Chamberlayne enter her box, a bouquet that he recognizes in her hand, a close observer might note a curiously blent expression cross Lord Stair's face. Every gambler is superstitious, let his game be the running of a horse, the extension of an empire, or only the winning of a woman's "yes." Lord Stair, who believes in nothing, believes in presentiments. Quietly listening to Patti during the first act of the "*Barbiere*," he has been thinking, not of Rosina, not of the crowded opera-house,

but of the one engrossing subject earth holds for him, himself, and, half unconsciously, has resolved to stake his hopes upon an omen.

If Leah enter the theatre without his bouquet, his gods are against him. Let him make up his mind to accept their enmity with resignation ; waste time no longer on the will-o'-the-wisp pursuit of fortune dependent on such frail chances as a man's last will and testament, or a coquette's caprice ! If she wear them—if she wear them, let him take heart of grace, speak boldly, as he has never done before, and to-night. At pretty speeches, as he proved long ago, Leah laughs ; to sentiment, or its language, a remembrance keen as death makes her invulnerable. Wounded pride, humiliation under neglect, these must be his allies. Not from sympathy with his cause, but in despairing revolt against her own life, must she be brought—if, indeed, she ever shall be brought, to listen to him ! Surprising into what humiliating positions the vainest men are sometimes pressed by the irresistible logic of their own sorry actions.

He waits patiently until Rosina is again on the scene, then makes his appearance in Mrs. Chamberlayne's box, with that quiet air of assurance to which the world's eyes are now pretty well used, and almost in silence they listen to the music ; such silence as human beings are prone to keep when questions of gravest moment, of liking or of hating, weigh on their minds. A word of Leah's gives Lord Stair the opening for which he seeks. The curtain has fallen on the second act, and Patti has been thrice recalled before the footlights, and the brand new tenor from La Scala, who is singing with her, and the contralto, and the basso, according to the wearisome custom of the London stage ; and fans begin to flutter, and flirtations to awaken round the asphyxiated house.

"I have not thanked you for my bouquet, Milor, assuming always that it came from you? Deb remarked that the sender understood the art of clever flattery. Certainly, he must have had some magic knowledge of my tastes." And as she speaks, Leah raises the bouquet to her face. "I think every flower I like best in the world is gathered together here."

"I am in no danger of forgetting Mrs. Chamberlayne's likes or dislikes," is Lord Stair's answer, "even in so small a matter as Gloire de Dijon roses." Then he adds, quickly, and in a voice so grave that Leah cannot choose but turn to him: "That bouquet plays a more important part in the ruling of my destiny than you can guess at. If you had chanced to leave it on your dressing-table, I should have started for Paris by the 7.40 train to-morrow morning. Oh, I am quite in earnest, Mrs. Chamberlayne. I have my superstitions, like other people; and if you had refused to wear my flowers, my mind was fully made up as to wishing England and everything it contains a tolerably long good-bye."

"What dire events from trivial causes spring!" England to lose Lord Stair through sin of mine! But you need not have been afraid," she adds. "No one need doubt my accepting any good thing of life that comes into my hands; flowers, like these, most of all."

"Unless others that you happened to prefer had forestalled them. And I had good reason to dread rivalry." Lord Stair says this carelessly, as a man not measuring his words; but his eyes never for an instant cease to watch her face. "Jack was strolling about in Covent Garden, at the same hour as myself, this morning, and the magnificence of the bouquet I saw him choose might well have thrown my humble offering into the shade."

"Jack . . . is evidently beginning to care for ladies' society at last," answers Leah, a little distantly. "Deb and I did our best to make him come with me to-night, but in vain. We brought him, indeed, after much persecution, to acknowledge that he was engaged to a ball elsewhere ; and when one couples that with the fact of his ordering bouquets——"

"—— Engaged to a ball elsewhere !" interrupts Lord Stair, as though the idea had only just recurred to him. "Why, of course he is. Jack told me about it himself. Engaged to a ball at Miss Madge Hathaway's, and half the young fellows of his age in London with him. And the bouquet, equally of course, was for his fair hostess. I might have thought of that at the time."

In a second, the light he knows, the light he wished to evoke, comes into Leah's eyes. She utters never a word ; but her very silence, her silence and the cold compression of her lips, tell Lord Stair that he has struck home.

"There is really no pleasanter house of its kind, than Miss Hathaway's," he goes on presently ; "and you meet every one there ! I have an invitation for to-night, myself—if I can get away early enough from Fitz-Osborne House. And I can assure you, Mrs. Chamberlayne, people fight for an invitation to one of Madge's balls ! She is as popular a little woman as any in town. She is hospitable to a fault——"

"—— She is an actress !" exclaims Leah, with chill emphasis. "Oh, I know quite well who Miss Hathaway is. I have seen her." Once or twice of late, Jack Chamberlayne has, in truth, been driven by Miss Hathaway in her pony-carriage about the parks. "As regards Mr. Chamberlayne, he may or may not think it good taste to keep up his bachelor acquaintance with these theatrical characters ; but unless you and I want to

quarrel, Lord Stair, it is a subject, I think, which had best never be spoken of between us again."

And here, Reader, I must, in justice, pause ; having a higher eulogium to pass upon the theatrical character than Lord Stair has done. Do you not meet "every one" at a house like Lady Jane Fuller's ? Does not "every one" fight for an invitation from the Duchess of St. Ives ?

Miss Madge Hathaway (to call her by her play-bill name) is, in her domestic relations, a woman by whom many a fine lady of fashion might take pattern ; but a Bohemian to the finger tips : estimating whitewash at its intrinsic value ; aping few virtues, though possessing many ; accepting bouquets and adulation from men at whom she laughs as freely as though she were a denizen of Mayfair itself ; ready to drive Jack Chamberlayne, or Jack Anybody, in her pony-carriage to-day, yet resenting it not if he refrain from lifting his hat to her in his wife's presence to-morrow. A brave frank-hearted little human creature, taking all swift advantage of the hours, making the most of youth and pleasure while they last, but at the same time working valiantly at the hard profession to which she was born, and supporting two or three worthless relations, and an idle husband whom she adores, out of her earnings.

And yet Leah, who has ever looked upon the influence of Bell Baltimore over poor Jack as a saving one, considers that he has committed a sin unpardonable in accepting an invitation to Madge Hathaway's house ; an opinion which, I fear, would remain unchanged, could every noble action of the little actress's life be laid bare before her. At her calmest times Leah can feel with greater strength than she can reason, and to-night, with body and mind both off their balance, she is just in the state when air-light trifles can be taken as deadliest premedi-

tated wrongs, and resented with all the illogical unforgiveness of despair.

Lord Stair perceives the advantage he has gained, and is not slow to make the most of it. She judges her husband—surely she judges him too harshly—remember Jack's age, the irresistible force of early associations! Like all other young men, now-a-days, he has got a taste for Bohemianism that better influences seem unable to cure. And yet—"And yet," exclaims Jack's generous advocate, a ring of feeling that almost sounds like nature in his voice, "when I think of such a man possessing the most priceless treasure earth can yield, possessing you, and able to find interest still in the society of actresses and singing girls—quarrel with me, Mrs. Chamberlayne, if you will, yet this once I must speak—my blood boils with indignation!"

Leah turns her face aside in silence; not moved, as Lord Stair may doubtless imagine, by *his* eloquence, but by the passionate bitterness of her own thoughts. Ere she can recover herself enough to answer, he has spoken again; hurriedly, with genuine agitation, genuine eagerness. May not the vital chances of Lord Stair's life, his prospect of a beggared old age or of a golden one, depend upon her reception of his words?

"I am a ruined man, as you know, Mrs. Chamberlayne, a man without much hope or good of any kind left in him; and still, if you were free—now, or years hence—if you were free, and would share my poverty while you accepted my devotion, I believe, on my soul, that I should be a different fellow to what I have ever been yet, and make you happy."

"Happy?" repeats Leah, and looks at him—oh, with what a smile upon her lips! "We have wandered in these regions of

romance before, have we not? Utopia and moonlight, and now it seems poverty, as the ultimate destiny of the two most worldly people in London! Don't you think we had better attend a little to Rosina? Pathetic warblings sound more appropriate behind the footlights than in the boxes."

With this reply Lord Stair must, perforce, content himself; and still he holds his omen to have proved trustworthy. For Leah has listened to him. Very few men rise superior to the teaching of their school; and according to Lord Stair's philosophy, the woman who listens, hesitates. Now if destiny but befriend him . . . Destiny! A man's own steady will is destiny. He has worked the game out hitherto, move by move, as he had planned it. From what unsuspected quarter should checkmate overtake him at the last? Not very long shall Lord Stair remain unenlightened on this point.

The opera over, Mrs. Chamberlayne quits her box on his arm. It is a subscription night, and every lobby and passage is filled to overflowing with that least supportable of crowds, an upper ten thousand mob.

Well, as she passes along, crushed and crushing, it chances that Leah hears her own name spoken—by whose tongue *she* knows not, will never know—her name, then Jack's: and *then* a few words of biting commentary, just such as you would *look* hear amidst an upper ten thousand mob, upon the *prospect* future and actual, of both.

The speaker, a woman, is one of those who call a *spade* spade and Roland a fripon. And, clear as the writing on Babylonian palace wall, Leah, with a start, sees her *marriage* ay, and the hidden depths of her own soul, *as the world sees* A premonition that saves? Oh, Reader, a premonition more often leads the other way. Once know the *fair*

your name to be irrevocably maligned, and scarce one human being out of fifty but will be tempted, in time, to make the falsehood good.

And this is the goal of her ambitious hopes! Flattered, sought after, and as a necessary result calumniated, a leader of fashion, upon her road at this moment to the most exclusive house in London—a present rich in fruition, with every reasonable promise of a morrow more golden still. For these ends and no other, did she, a girl of twenty, put sweet human love away out of her heart, and offer herself, a willing sacrifice, at the altar of Mammon. Such triumphs had she in view on that October night in Paris when she essayed Jack Chamberlayne's diamonds, with little Deb for audience; the night when, dressed in her old brown silk, penniless still, save in prospect, innocent, so far, at least, as she was ignorant of better things, she first met Danton.

Danton They have by this time emerged from the heated opera-house into the air. Denser than ever is the crush; uncertain at their present rate of progress seems the chance of reaching the Duchess of St. Ives' ball-room by midnight, if then. At length, after patient endurance of a few more minutes buffeting, Lord Stair proposes that he shall make his way quickly down the line of carriages in search of Mrs. Chamberlayne's brougham, leaving her, if she does not fear being left alone amidst the crowd.

"Mrs. Chamberlayne fears nothing in the universe," cries Leah with a laugh. Since she heard the whisper of that unknown tongue it seems as though a new forlorn courage had indeed taken possession of her. "If you should be lost altogether, Lord Stair—tragic supposition!—I dare say some other good Samaritan would come to my side."

A man strolling along the pavement, a cigarette between his lips, turns round shortly at her voice.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

CHECKMATE !

FROM budding time to blossoming. Reader, has it happened to you to mark the effects upon yourself of that transition ? You journey forth into the country some buoyant April evening, perhaps after sickness has long held you prisoner to the blank dreariness of bricks and mortar, and find a world fresh dyed. Every tree and meadow stippled over with fairy touches of emerald, clouds of scarce-opened white upon the thorn, pale daffodils and primroses, the sisterhood that comes "before the swallow dares," along the banks, the birds piping forth their untuned love-notes on the air whose crispness still bespeaks a touch of east wind. Colours, odours, sounds, all move you to a delight so keen it borders upon pain, not so much for what *is*, as for what is coming. Well, and you go back to town ; at the end of three or four weeks of hot sunshine, return. The trees are in broad leaf, the grassfields ripening for the mower ; the hawthorn already shows a hectic blush ; the bird's notes have grown sweeter, mellow ; the east wind is gone, and gone the delight that thrilled your heart like pain. The buds have blossomed ; promise has become fulfilment.

Just such an effect may be wrought upon a man by the beauty of the woman whom he loved and last saw as a girl. That beauty may be heightened by art, softened through the grace that comes with knowledge of life ; its bloom of incomplete-

ness, the first wild charm of promise, has vanished for ever. Danton, for it is he, stops short; in a second Leah recognizes him, their hands have met and they stand looking at each other, silent, pale, forgetful of all conventional forms of greeting; stand as two inhabitants of the same country might do, who, after long years of separation, should abruptly find themselves face to face upon a foreign shore.

"I was determined not to let you escape this time you see, M. Danton." So Leah at length addresses him, with a forced little tone of banter, in one of those set little phrases to which a woman of the world instinctively resorts when she finds herself betrayed into some position where she has to feel as a human being, not act as a puppet. "After the determined way you cut me the other night in Piccadilly, I hardly knew if I should venture——"

"I could never, under any circumstances, wish to cut Mrs. Chamberlayne," remarks Danton. Coldly self-possessed is his voice, distant his manner to her. Jack himself, if he were present, could scarce find ground of offence. "As to the other night in Piccadilly—surely, Mrs. Chamberlayne, I acted discreetly in passing on my way without seeking your recognition?"

"And you have been hearing Patti, of course?" In her confusion, Leah does not remark how little Danton's dress bespeaks attendance at the opera. "Did she not sing divinely? And what do you think of this new Italian tenor we are all wild about? And was not the house full; and—and why have you never come to call upon us all this time, M. Danton?"

Her lips quiver as they give utterance to these incoherences; her face is blanched to the hue it wore on that last evening of

farewells in the atelier. But Danton feels no spark of mercy for her. Months ago, when he used to read scraps of her letters to the children, when he pictured her weary, heartsick, alone in Italy with Jack Chamberlayne, his heart at times would melt, almost into forgiveness of her treachery towards himself. Four weeks ago, when he first arrived in London, white cheeks, quivering lips and fluttering confusion might have touched him only too acutely. Not now. On that night when Lord Stair parted from her in Piccadilly, Danton gained one true glimpse, as he believed, into her life ; on that night he formed conclusions not widely different from the whispers of the crowd as to her outlook for the future. How should he feel pity for a woman like this ! A coquette, not by instinct, as in her girlhood, but of calculation ; one who, as a necessary art, must *know* how to assume tearful eyes and trembling lips at will ; and who now, for a whim, an impulse, a passing "caprice de grande dame," would fain lure back him, the poor discarded lover of old days, to swell her list of conquests, fan more important jealousy, or serve whatever other end may suit the frivolous purpose of the moment best !

"I have no money to spend upon opera tickets, Mrs. Chamberlayne ; you might have spared me the humiliation of such an avowal. Without seeking far, too, you might divine why I have not called on you and your husband. Look !" and holding out his arm, Danton displays the sleeve of a somewhat threadbare morning jacket. "One cannot pay stately visits of ceremony in a coat that 'shows the white thread,' as Madame Bonchrétien used to say."

Stately visits of ceremony ! She turns from him, a choking sensation in her throat, a mingled sense of humiliation and disappointment holding her dumb, and sees the tall figure of

Lord Stair approaching at two or three yards' distance through the crowd.

. A sufficiently vivid contrast the two men present at this moment : Lord Stair in his ne plus ultra of evening dress, his embroidered linen, scientifically cut coat, his button-hole flower, his gloves, and with a flush of exultation upon his usually impassive face ; Danton pale, obscure, poorly dressed, a "social failure" now as in the time, long years ago, when Madeleine deserted him.

"Your carriage is found, Leah !". Lightly Lord Stair speaks her name ; little Lord Stair thinks that he has spoken it for the last time in this world ! "But I am afraid it will be a question of the mountain and Mahomet if you intend to reach Fitz-Osborne House to-night. Now, if you would not mind walking sixty or seventy yards, you—you——:" the fluency suddenly dying out of his utterance as he discovers that Leah is not alone. "M. Danton, I have the honour of wishing you a very good-evening." And Lord Stair lifts his hat with courtesy, a well-bred player on life's great chess-board, even under the first smart of "mate" so overwhelming as this which has overtaken him.

Danton returns the salutation in silence ; at the same time makes a movement as though he would pass along his road. What business, in truth, has he here ? What interest for him have the actions, capricious or sincere, of this woman whom he was weak enough once to love ? Weak enough *once* ! whom he has not strength of will, even now, as she stands before him in her diamonds and (as he holds it) her falseness, to sever wholly from his heart.

"I have a few more words that I should like to say to you, M. Danton," she cries, in that faltering, broken voice he re-

members. "And you, Lord Stair, will you make my excuses to the Duchess of St. Ives, if indeed she remembers my existence enough to notice my absence? I am not feeling well; the heat, the crowd have been too much for me; and I shall ask M. Danton to see me to my carriage."

And in far less time than it takes me to write, she has turned from Lord Stair *for ever*; has rested her hand, with a little gesture of appealing that it would indeed require stern philosophy to repulse upon Danton's arm.

CHAPTER XXXV.

FOR THIS ONCE.

For a moment George Francis Lord Stair stands like a man transfixed—a moment only; then his happy, ever-ready "knack of irrelevance" comes back to him; the situation in all its bearings stands clear before his mind.

It has been well remarked that the promptest judges of human action and motive are generally those whose habits of thought do not lead them to see too far. Lord Stair carries precisely as far as Lord Stair's own forty years' dealing with the kind may serve to enlighten him. Women, by natural influence are capricious, hysterical; actresses from their cradles. Marriage, or afterwards, if they do not love you, or if they love you (the last especially), unreliability is about the quality they possess that can be relied on. These theories, generally applicable to women at large, more so than to this individual woman who at the moment has befooled him.

A man of wider capacities might easily fall into the error of suspecting the meeting with Danton to be planned, or at least premeditated. Lord Stair suspects nothing of the kind. He sees the truth, as far as outward facts are concerned, in its naked cynical reality. Bored, listless, stung into passion by her husband's neglect, restlessly seeking for any new emotion, Leah was brought to listen to his own "eloquence," one short hour ago. Bored, listless, recklessly seeking for any new emotion, she is ready to listen to the rough reproaches of a man like Danton, now. Arrived at the pinnacle of notoriety for which she has striven; upon her road to the house that she has been moving heaven and earth to enter; covered with the Chamberlayne diamonds, and with his, Lord Stair's, flowers in her hand; could anything be more exquisitely reasonless, more picturesquely unlooked for, and therefore probable, than that she should give up *all* for the sake of spending five romantic minutes on the arm of this lover in rags, whom she jilted, without a scruple, before her marriage?

What will be the sequel to the caprice—ah, and what his own line of conduct, his own reprisals? These are matters Milor can consider over at his leisure in the Duchess of St. Ives' ball-room. I speak only of the facts of the immediate situation—such material facts as can be seen and handled—and I repeat that Lord Stair grasps them with an impartiality, a decision, that do him credit.

"Ill? my dear Mrs. Chamberlayne, I am exceedingly grieved to hear it. These sudden illnesses are always so alarming;" an accent just sufficient to point his meaning upon the word "sudden." "Now what had I better say to Jack about it? In these matters it is well to be prepared. I shall be sure to

see your husband by-and-by at Miss Hathaway's. Will it be wise to tell him——?"

"It will be wise to tell him the truth," cries Leah, and her eyes meet Lord Stair's, with an expression such as he has never read in them before. "Jack is not given to undue nervousness. Tell him simply that I felt faint——"

"And that, by good fortune, I was able to leave you in the excellent professional care of M. Danton? Under all circumstances, you may depend upon my sending Jack home at as early an hour as I can." Lord Stair's manner, as he takes upon himself this friendly errand, is really a model of delicate breeding; the manner of a man to whom a "scene" is worse than a sin; strong feeling, or its expression, an outrage against every received canon of decent taste. "You are making some stay in town, I presume, M. Danton? Have come to England to reside! Ah, indeed. Then I trust we shall have the pleasure, ere long, of meeting. Mrs. Chamberlayne, I shall hope to hear better accounts of you to-morrow morning."

And lifting his hat, with quiet unconcern, to them both, Lord Stair disappears amidst the crowd, his face impassive as on that evening when Leah found him drinking Madame's Sunday punch before the fire; the evening when she declared that no old love could ever by possibility arise—a Nemesis—against her!

And once again, unlooked-for chance upon this side the grave, she and Danton are alone. Lord Stair converted into an implacable enemy, her husband's long-threatened justice a thing assured! Yes, but what matters this—or the losing of the world and all it contains, for the matter of that? Her world, with its tawdry joys, its poor ambitions, *is* lost. She realizes that fact vaguely, but feels no pang of regret over their loss.

The crowd, the carriages, the lights—London itself, exist not, as far as Leah's self-absorbed mind is concerned, during the next few seconds of time. She only lives in the universe; she, and one other human being; and the stars shine somewhere overhead, as they did that night in the avenue of the Champs Elysées, and life, while those seconds last, is sweet.

"I don't know what you will think of me for giving you all this trouble, but I was glad of an excuse for escaping another ball . . . one gets so sick of this eternal gaiety."

So at last she speaks, the sound of her own altered voice bringing her back with a start to bitterest consciousness. Alas, she can no more command it than she can command the hand that trembles upon his arm, the heart that palpitates to sickness within her breast. "But I am really feeling ill, M. Danton—if you would not mind very much the trouble of taking me to my carriage?"

"I am at your orders always, Mrs. Chamberlayne," answers Danton, with chill politeness. "If I did not sooner offer you my arm, you must remember that this pleasure has come upon me—unexpectedly, and that I looked upon Lord Stair as your escort. The last time it was my fate to conduct you through a crowd," he adds, "a very different one to this—we were walking in the Champs Elysées. You have forgotten the occasion, no doubt?"

"I have forgotten nothing," she answers, with sad humility. If the heart of a jilted man could ever be generous enough to pardon, surely that tone should evoke forgiveness! "There is just the sharpest edge of pain, I think, that all one's strength, all one's will, cannot help one to forget."

"Pain! My dear Mrs. Chamberlayne, you must really forgive me for my scepticism," and Danton laughs, "but doctors

are proverbially hard of belief. We see such endless, acute bodily sufferings in our profession, that we grow callous about sentimental ones. What was the opera to-night? Only the 'Barbieri.' I should have thought you had been assisting, at least, at the breaking of Lucia's heart, to have your imagination strung in such a minor key."

"Do you recollect your telling me once that the hard work of London, 'the crowded rooms, late hours, stimulants, narcotics,' that a life like this entails, would kill me?"

"I am afraid I must reply to that question in your own words. I have forgotten—have been able to forget—nothing. Whatever I may have said, it is evident that I had not the gift of true prophecy," he goes on, jestingly. "You are looking charmingly well, as all your crowds of friends, I am sure, must tell you. Well, and if you will let me say so, handsomer, a hundred times, if that be possible, than on the evening when I watched you drive away from Madame Bonchrétien's door in Paris."

"M. Danton, your prophecy was correct to the letter." Simply and slowly Leah speaks, thinking more of the substance of her words than of the effect they may produce upon her hearer. "The life of London is killing me fast, and there is no one to stretch out a hand to save me. You talk of my crowds of friends? In this wide world there can be no woman, I should think, more absolutely friendless than I. This is being 'strung in a minor key,' you will say. Well, you can believe me or not, as you choose."

"Believe! and what reason have I to believe you?" he exclaimed. Very low, very self-contained is Danton's voice; not the nearest listener in the crowd could overhear him, and yet it vibrates with passion. "Eight months' additional practice can

scarcely have lessened your proficiency—shall we call it your proficiency—in the art of smoothing down the sharp angles of unpalatable truths. Recollect, Mrs. Chamberlayne. The last time you and I talked together was in the atelier in the Rue Castiglione, two nights before your wedding. And we indulged in dark forebodings then,” says Danton, bitterly ; “ had melodramatic visions of self-sacrifice, hearts breaking sooner than be false, upon the very altar steps. Well, and when I saw you next, at the chapel in the Avenue Marbœuf, you looked as beautiful and, you must let me add, as little likely to die as you do at this moment.”

“ You are unjust——”

“ Say rather that I am most just, have got back the sober senses that played me false during the seven or eight days of last October. A man can scarcely go through what I have done during all the time since then, and reap no profit from his pain. You know what my experiences have been,” he goes on, unheeding the white misery of her face ; “ my experience as a lad, my experience since I first met you. Do you think it likely that I, of all men living, will ever put faith again in the look, or word, or action, of a coquette ?”

“ This is plain speaking, indeed,” she utters, half-withdrawing her hand from his arm.

“ It is speaking that you yourself have forced upon me,” Danton answers, almost roughly. “ We shall do far better, believe me, to keep to pleasant insincerities, Mrs. Chamberlayne. Let us talk of delicious tenors, of your dress, your fan—never was a device more elegant. Your bouquet—allow me, as far as your carriage, to relieve you of its weight. Let us use the language of your world, the world into which it is your pleasure for ten minutes to introduce me, and I will do my best to be

well-bred, polished, meaningless, as any fool of quality you reckon among your slaves. But let us leave pathetic regret, above all, let us leave remembrance, alone."

Danton holds out his hand towards her flowers ; the bouquet that was to have proved Lord Stair's good omen ; but ere he can touch them they lie soiled and broken in the street, flung passionately away, as though their very contact were defilement, by Leah. (The driver of a hansom picks them up ; as he wipes the mud from their white petals, thinks, perhaps, upon a pale girl's face at home to whom the sight of flowers like these may bring sunshine).

"You are right, M. Danton ; I thank you for recalling me to reason. People who are sensible leave remembrances alone, and do not trouble themselves too much about the future. The present, this very night of June the thirtieth, is all that the wisest man living can call his own. Who knows where, or what we shall be, any of us, by the day after to-morrow ?"

"The day after to-morrow," returns Danton, coldly, "will be Thursday. By a glance at my memorandum-book, I could tell you, almost to a minute, how I shall pass it, the exact amount of grim, unpicturesque human misery that I shall be called upon to witness. By turning to your tablets, surely you will find *your* engagements written likewise ? The flower-show, polo-match, dinner, ball, destined to be graced by Mrs. Chamberlayne's presence."

"If ever you and I meet each other again, M. Danton, not like this, but spirit to spirit, conscience to conscience, I wonder, looking back, whether charity will be borne in upon you at last ? You can feel compassion, I am sure, for your hospital patients, as you used to feel it for the poor in Paris. If any

one wear silks and diamonds, have the misfortune to be a slave to balls and operas, you are pitiless."

"If I pitied—I must do more than pity," answers Danton, very low. As she speaks, something in her voice has recalled to him the moment in the atelier when he promised, whatever befell, to be her friend always. "As soon as I believe in suffering I must seek to cure it, and——"

"And my case is beyond the reach of physic," she interrupts him, hastily. "That is what you would say, is it not? You are right, quite right. My case is beyond the reach of physic!"

"The first essential for working a cure is, that the patient himself desire to be cured."

"And I—am satisfied with my state; find pleasure, as you see, in operas and balls, in fans of elegant device, and silks and diamonds. M. Danton, here is my carriage. How can I apologize enough for all the trouble I have given you, the nonsense to which I have been obliging you to listen?"

She steps lightly into her brougham, commands her lips as they bid Danton good-bye; her hand as it rests, but no longer trembles, in his. And then, when he has walked away, she quietly gives the command, "Home," to her servants, and finds herself driving through the soft purple of the summer midnight in the direction of Piccadilly.

. . . So the cup of her humiliation is drained to the last drop, the moral of her story spoken, and by Danton's lips. "Could he, of all men, put faith again in the word or look or action of a coquette?" The logical ending, the only one she had a right to look for, to the godless ceremony in the Avenue Marbœuf has come, or is at hand. And with it all, a lightened feeling is at Leah's heart. She has once more—and for the last time—

spoken to Danton. She realizes the consequences of her action as clearly as though eyes were looking askance at her in the Park—her husband's loudly-promised justice, Lord Stair's whispered threats, already carried into effect. And still her heart feels lighter, her lungs breathe in a purer atmosphere. For she *fears* no longer.

Money can buy so little ; let all it can buy go, and by how much would she, Leah Chamberlayne, be the poorer ? A stock of dresses, a dozen sets of jewels, the lip-service of a lady's-maid, some score of the men and women called friends, and ready cash to enclose in filial letters to Prince Charming.

Love, and all belonging to love, are gone ; then welcome the poverty which should have been love's price. Away from this feverish London, forgotten of the world,—show, glitter, reputation, forfeited, it may happen that once, ere she die, she shall taste peace. Such existence as she has known of late, at least, is over. The treadmill of heart-broken pleasure, the passionless, weary journey along the downhill road of evil, the never-silent reproaches of her own conscience—over.

Now just one more scene, one very commonplace part of the drama has to be acted. She must make her confession to her husband. That Lord Stair will deliver her message, fulfil his errand of betrayal, she knows ; but there will be still much of which it behoves her to speak, and to-night. The star-lit walk in the Champs Elysées, the meeting at the Café Chantant—every detail of her black infidelity (of the one hour in which she trod nearest to life's fair and honest possibilities) Jack shall learn. And if he kill her for it, if he kill her for her frankness, death can come but once ; and 'twere sweeter, perhaps, if one knew all, to die now, at twenty years old, for truth, than live for falsehood.

In her sorrows or her joys, Leah's mind can never get beyond the limits of immediate and personal emotion. Her imagination cannot deal with consequences that are complex and indirect. To look upon a crisis such as this through which she is passing, as a stepping-stone to higher things, a landmark of either mental or moral progress, were impossible to her. Love is slain; money and good repute have become as shadows; and death, if it choose to come, will she not fear.

. . . . Years teach us, with their oft-repeated sorrows, that to live requires more heroism than to die. The courage of this girl of twenty is but the delirium of the poor wretch who smiles on earth and sky before taking the plunge from the dark arch into the darker river below; the blind desire to escape from present pain, no matter at what cost or by what outlet.

"And Madame has returned already?" So cries the smooth suspicious voice of the French lady's-maid, when she sees her mistress's face, midnight, as yet, scarce past. "Has anything dreadful happened—is Madame ill?"

No. Madame was never better; requires only to be left alone,—and Melanie may seek her pillow without delay. Madame can unpin her diamonds, can lay aside her silks and laces for this once without assistance. *For this once!*



CHAPTER XXXVI.

JACK SEES HIS DUTY.

MISS MADGE HATHAWAY's ball has reached its zenith. The ceremony of supper is over; waltz, galop, and waltz are suc-

ceeding each other with genuine after-supper celerity. A glimmer of pearly day-dawn through the half-closed venetians already shows the flaws on beauty's cheek, and yields to hard-worked waiters and long-suffering musicians the welcome assurance that even the spirit of a Bohemian ball cannot be kept up for ever.

Among the hundreds of party-givers in and out of London society to-night, I should say that few have more cause for self-congratulation than Madge Hathaway. Her guests have enjoyed themselves with an unrestrained heartiness oftener met with, perhaps, in the outside artist world than in the great one. The champagne, supper, music, all have turned out irreproachably. Dionysius Robinson, that Ursa Major of theatrical critics, who *never* goes to any other balls in the profession but Madge's, has not only been present, but has failed to take offence at anything. And, lastly, late, 'tis true, but, however little one may have of his company, a Viscount is a Viscount always—Lord Stair has just put in an appearance. "On his way," so Madge explains afterwards to her friends, looking half an inch taller as she speaks, "from a ball, with royalty present at the Dowager Duchess of St. Ives'."

With all her sterling virtues, Miss Hathaway is not free from the one small British vice of title-loving. Rigid Herbert Robarts, presiding over her harlequin tea-service at a water kettledrum, could scarcely be gladder of a lord from the atmosphere of duchesses and princes, than is the hearted, sham-detesting little actress, in her St. John's ball-room.

Supper, as I have said, is over, as a ceremony, but in its more intimate and convivial sense, has scarcely reached its height, when the announcement of Lord Stair's near

causes an excitement among Madge's guests. The hostess herself is in the supper-room (the entire back premises of the house, canvassed in, boarded, and gas-lit for the occasion), with three or four devoted attendants ministering to her needs. Of these, one holds her plate, a second her glass, a third the champagne bottle. To Jack Chamberlayne, as a special favour—perhaps because his unsteady hands best suit the office—Madge has entrusted her gloves and bouquet. Similar little groups of suns and satellites are to be seen on all sides, and on all sides are merry heart-whole laughter, and a conspicuous absence of those heavy and serious flirtations to be met with in entertainments of a different class. Not one of Madge's lady guests but is connected more or less directly with the stage; and they have come to Madge's ball, frankly, to dance, to drink champagne, to be amused! Pass your life in representing business love-scenes, at so many shillings, or pounds, a night—the same love-scene, if the public approve, for three hundred nights, it may be, at a stretch—and you will soon grow to disconnect the employment with any idea of pastime. Young gentlemen, accustomed to furnish ball-room small-talk for Belgravian partners, not unfrequently have to attest the truth of this statement when they would pour the same honied utterances into the hardened and unbelieving ears of “the profession.”

Lord Stair makes his way in, his crush hat under his arm, amidst the evergreens and silver paper flowers, that deck the entrance door to the supper-room; and Madge, with her real smile, and her imitation diamonds, runs forward to meet him. She does not like the man; her woman's instincts are too true for that; but, as I have been forced to confess for her, she dearly likes his title. And when you remember that Lydia

Montmorenci is not six yards distant — poor Lydia Montmorenci, her very dearest friend, who has been making vain efforts to secure even a baronet for *her* ball next week, you will not be disposed to judge Madge Hathaway's weakness too severely.

"So good of you, my lord! I was beginning to fear I should not have the honour. If I had been quite sure of your lordship's coming, I would have delayed the supper hour, but——"

"Supper is an indiscretion I never commit, myself," says Lord Stair, coolly taking his place at Madge's side, to the discomfort of her other attendants, Jack Chamberlayne excepted. "If I am in time, however, to be Miss Hathaway's cup-bearer, I am more lucky than I deserve. Ah, Chamberlayne! you here? I thought the doctors had forbidden you to keep such late hours?"

"That is what I have been telling him, all along," cries kind-hearted Madge. "But poor Jack is as perverse as a baby. Now did I, or did I not, order you *not* to be here to-night, Mr. Chamberlayne? Answer truly."

"You sent me an invitation, and you told me to stay away," replies Jack, captiously. He is looking more haggard even than his wont—a very death's-head at Madge's feast. His cheeks are livid, save where one patch of fever stains ~~them~~ his eyes glassy and staring. "How the —— was I to ~~be~~ which was meant in sincerity?"

"Whenever a lady is concerned, you may be quite sure what she advocates most, she desires least," says Lord "It is a rule, my dear boy, that you will hardly ever ~~ff~~ wrong on application."

"Indeed! I prefer my own experience on all ~~suby~~ see. to that of other people."

Jack's tone is as near rudeness as possible. 1

first fierce jealousy of Lord Stair died long ago, his hatred for him, personally, remains vital as ever. And to-night Jack is curiously disposed to quarrel with every one. Leah's last words, her face as she spoke to him of repentance "at the eleventh hour," linger unpleasantly in his recollection. If I were not afraid of using language altogether too grandiloquent for the occasion, I should well-nigh feel inclined to say that Jack Chamberlayne's conscience pricks him.

"Right, perfectly right," returns Lord Stair, with his usual conciliating air of patronage. "No wisdom like that which we acquire practically eh, Jack? And life, in these days, supplies a tolerably wide experience to most men, provided they possess the essential faculty of keeping their eyes open."

"Keeping their eyes open! What do you mean by that? I don't suppose you are alluding to me, sir, are you?"

"I am alluding to all men; to myself, most of all," answers Lord Stair, pleasantly. "Whatever wisdom I may possess, and it is not great, has come to me at first hand, generally"—and he turns with an air of gallantry to Madge, "from the cruel treatment I have received at the hands of your sex, Miss Hathaway."

It is long before Miss Hathaway finishes her supper. A Viscount supporting one's plate and filling one's champagne-glass is not, Madge feels, a sight to slur over before one's dearest friends. At last, however, her duties as hostess recall her to the ball-room, and then Jack Chamberlayne, who has been sitting fixedly watching the empty bottles on the suppertable, rises, and comes up abruptly to Lord Stair.

"You put my question off just now, so I deferred it until we were alone. What did you mean by your remark about a man keeping his eyes open? Because, if you meant it for me——"

"For you, my dear Chamberlayne," repeats Iago, soothingly. "You really disconcert me. What right could I possibly have to give an opinion? Every fellow's affairs are his own—I—I——"

"You shall eat your words or make them plainer," interrupts Jack in a hoarse undertone, his slight frame all a-quiver with agitation. "I know what you mean, perfectly well. Do you think I have not heard your cursed way of sneering down other women's reputation? You alluded—no, I will not mention names here. But you take me for a very different man to what I am, if you think I shall allow a cowardly innuendo of that kind to pass."

A flush not good to see rises to Lord Stair's forehead; the fingers of his gloved right hand close upon each other with ominous tightness. Then the unwonted impulse dies; the second nature, which in him has become stronger than nature itself, gains the ascendancy.

"If I were not sure," he remarks, with calm indolence of tone, with the whole look and manner of a man too absolutely beyond the reach of an affront to feel the necessity of resenting it; "if I were not sure that you don't mean a syllable you say, Jack, I should take the liberty of calling you——"

"What, sir? Pray go on."

"An exceedingly foolish boy, trying to pick a quarrel with a friend old enough to be his father. A quarrel—between *us*—for language that was never used, respecting a subject that never existed! Apropos of nothing, Jack"—Lord Stair comes a step nearer, and rests his hand upon the other's shoulder—"I believe, now I think of it, that I am charged with a message for you."

"A message!" repeats Jack, sullenly shifting his position, and only half reassured.

"From Mrs. Chamberlayne." The opening bars of the cotillon, the final dance of Madge's ball, have by this time cleared the supper-room of its last loiterers; so Lord Stair commits no indiscretion in mentioning Leah's name. "When I took leave of her outside the opera-house at midnight, I promised to send you home early if I found you here. But I am afraid, at this hour in the morning, the word 'early' has not quite the significance an anxious wife would desire."

Lord Stair's expression of face is genial; his manner—smooth, unconcerned, cautious—supplies no interpretation whatsoever to his speech. Yet, in a second, Jack's passion-sharpened faculties grasp the meaning it was intended they should grasp.

"Outside the opera—at midnight—I don't know what you are driving at. Mrs. Chamberlayne was on her way to the Duchess of St. Ives' ball. Do you mean to tell me you did not meet her there?"

"Well, no." Softly, deliberately, Lord Stair speaks, feeling no more pity for his hearer, than vacillation as to his own scheme of vengeance. "I had had the pleasure of being in Mrs. Chamberlayne's box during the last act—charmingly Patti sang for us in 'Rosina,' but this new tenor is a delusion; all new tenors are delusions. Mrs. Chamberlayne quitted the theatre on my arm, and——"

"And from the opera went on to Fitz-Osborne House. What's the good of making a long story out of nothing?"

Lord Stair pauses for a minute. He looks at Jack Chamberlayne hard.

"Mrs. Chamberlayne's *intention* was to have proceeded to

Fitz Osborne House, I know, but while I was searching for her carriage, she was seized with sudden faintness, and, I imagine, returned home. Oh, my dear fellow, you need not alarm yourself." For Jack's face has turned bloodless. "Mrs. Chamberlayne's indisposition was, I am persuaded, of a most transitory nature, and I had the satisfaction of leaving her in excellent professional care——"

"Professional!"

"Our old Paris friend, M. Danton—you know, of course, that he is in London?—by a lucky accident was passing along before the opera-house at that moment. I left Mrs. Chamberlayne on his arm."

Long ago in this story I remarked there were some few honest points in Jack Chamberlayne's character, beyond the lights of a Bell Baltimore to discover. There is courage in him, also, and manhood, beyond anything Lord Stair looked for. No well-balanced casuistries, no enlightenments from modern thought, perplex poor Jack. Of the philosophy which makes our nervous system the supreme arbiter, our notions of good and evil dependent on certain inherited conditions of bodily organization, he never heard. In his old-fashioned consistent, stumbling way, he has his own conception of *right* and acts up to it. And so, even before Lord Stair *is* speaking,

"He had seen his duty, a dead sure thing,
And went in for it, there and then."

Leah has disobeyed him; short and sharp shall be the thing between them; but that is for the future. Not Lord Stair, the self-elected detective who has chosen to be wrong, will he utter a word, show a trace of feeling, that *he* is wrong. He is her protector still—her protector, *as*

she has had the chance of self-defence. Not through weakness of his shall a shadow of suspicion rest upon her good name.

"M. Danton?—I had almost forgotten his existence. A fellow who lived in your Paris boarding-house, played on the piano, and that sort of thing, wasn't he? A very good sort of fellow, if I recollect right, and a favourite of Mrs. Chamberlayne's. As you say, you could not have left her under better care."

Thus, with death at his heart, does Jack Chamberlayne force his tongue to speak.

Lord Stair looks straight at him for a moment or two in silence. "And so you are not going to quarrel with me this time, Jack?" he exclaims, with a laugh. "And quite right too! There is not a man or woman living—a woman especially—worth the trouble of quarrelling about. Good-night, old fellow. I don't know what you Benedicts may say, but for sober old bachelors like me, it is time to be thinking of home."

After this fashion they part. If, unsuspected by himself, some rudimentary kind of conscience should exist within Lord Stair, it is possible that Jack Chamberlayne's face may haunt him in the dark days of gout and rheumatism yet to come.

CHAPTER XXXVII

AT THE ELEVENTH HOUR.

FOR the face wears a look that in our smooth, artificial, nineteenth-century lives we are seldom called upon to behold—the impotent despair of weakness, that shall soon become un-

reason. May you, reader, be spared from ever witnessing the like.

Away out of the house of feasting, away from the cruel din of violins, of moving feet, of merry voices. . . . So Jack Chamberlayne, scarce conscious of his actions, makes his last exit from the debateable land called Bohemia. Morning is softly breaking as he quits Miss Hathaway's villa ; by the time he reaches Piccadilly the rose-flush of sunrise already lies on tree and house-roof : the first fair day of a new July, gladdest month of the twelve to simple workers among fields and hedge-rows, has been given to the world.

Mr. Chamberlayne fits his latch-key, this time with no trembling hand, into the lock ; unfastens the door of the hotel, and walks quickly, as if his old school-boy strength had come back to him, up the stairs.

As he reaches the first landing the door of his wife's dressing-room opens, and a white figure appears there. Worn, heavy-eyed, and still with a tranquil expression round her lips, Lea advances a step or two to meet her husband.

"You are late, Jack—early, rather—I have just been waiting the sun rise," she whispers. "When one cannot sleep seems so good to see the day come."

He pushes her roughly aside, for she has attempted to lay her hand upon his arm, enters the dressing-room, locks the door, then crosses over to one of the windows, draws back the curtain and stands watching her ; all this in silence, more fragrant meaning to Leah than any speech to which she has lived her life.

At last—"Come here," he exclaims, curtly ; his wife shudders. She is accustomed to hear it loud, harsh, insistent, not concentrated, self-collected, as it is now

little closer, please." For Leah has drawn back from him : she leans wearily resting her arms upon the back of an arm-chair. " You are strong enough, surely, to stand unsupported, and look me in the face for the space of about three minutes ? What we have got to say to each other will scarcely take longer. I have seen Lord Stair, Mrs. Chamberlayne."

" Lord Stair told me that he intended to see you. At Miss Madge Hathaway's."

" Lord Stair quitted you last outside the opera-house. At what hour did you return to this hotel ?"

" I should imagine at five or ten minutes past twelve. It does not take long to drive from Covent Garden to Piccadilly."

" It would be too much to ask, perhaps, why you went through the form of returning here at all ?"

" Jack !"

" We have had the whole question out before, remember. I told you that on the day you renewed, or rather on the day I discovered you had renewed, a certain intimacy, we should wish each other good-bye. It is impossible for you to have forgotten this."

" I have renewed no intimacy. I met M. Danton, by accident, as I was leaving the opera, and I had turned faint. You know how little strength I had for it all when I started, when I asked you to come with me to-night. And I was glad, too, if you force me to tell the truth, to be rid of Lord Stair."

" The truth—spoken from you to me ! Well, Leah, I believe you for once. Lord Stair has lived his day. You are ambitious ; you told me that, I remember, in Paris, and you intended from the first, that Lord Stair should help us on in the world you affect, be our stepping-stone to dukes, duchesses, and

the like. He has done it. Now let us be rid of him. In any confession you choose to make of your own heartlessness or ingratitude, I believe you."

"My heartlessness!" she repeats. "My ingratitude towards Lord Stair——"

"Your ingratitude, black as night, to me," thunders Jack, his coolness forsaking him. "I was no saint, I know; I pretended to nothing of the kind when I married, but I did begin by loving you, and would have made you happy, if you had had a heart of flesh, not stone. Look at the way I have saved your whole family, by ——! Look what your father owes me already; and scarce a week but I get one of his plausible begging letters still. 'For the sake of his beloved Leah—the sweet and innocent tie that binds us together!' Ah, Colonel Pascal will find the difference. I consider myself bound to the impostor no longer by——"

"Stop!" exclaims Leah, the dark glow of passion in her eyes. "Before you insult me, or which is worse, my father, to my face, hear what I have to say. Do you think I have watched alone during the hours of this night? do you think I have watched the sun rise on another day, without forming some plans for leaving the hateful slavery of my life?"

"I have no doubt of it whatever. It would be too much, I suppose, to ask whose superior wisdom has guided you in your resolutions?"

"If you mean M. Danton," she replies, her manner altering in an instant, "you are as blindly, grossly wrong as you have always been in your suspicions. I met M. Danton by accident, as I might have met any other acquaintance of old days. He walked with me to my carriage, was with me, altogether, about ten minutes, or less. In all human probability, I should say

that M. Danton . . . and myself . . . will never speak to each other again while we live."

"You seem rather unduly agitated under such circumstances," remarks Jack, upon whom not a change in her voice or face is thrown away. "The recollection of a casual meeting, of an acquaintance to whom you will probably never speak again while you live, need scarcely, I should have thought, cause your lips to tremble, your breath to come short, your cheeks—but enough of all this!" he exclaims, with an accent of irrepressible disgust. "Act with me, be false with me no longer. Your game is played out to the very last card, as far as I am concerned. The rest," Jack says this with a laugh that might make your heart ache, "is for the lawyers. There shall be no scandal, you know. I wish to do my duty, to cast less slur upon you than you merit. There shall be nothing to hinder *you* from going to balls and dinner-parties still. Incompatibility of disposition; Mr. Chamberlayne's vile temper; any excuse you or your family prefer can be given to the world. But I will keep to the letter of what I threatened. We will live together no longer."

"Because I have disobeyed you, accidentally. I don't seek to change your resolution, Jack; I ask you simply to reflect upon what you are saying. Because M. Danton, not Lord Stair, walked with me from the door of the opera to my carriage."

"Because you have deceived me from the hour you became my wife and before, and others know it as well as I. Would you make me believe that Lord Stair—curse him, I say, with his smiling, sneering innuendos!—would you have me think Lord Stair knew nothing of your actions in the Rue Castiglione? Speak out, and if you care for yourself, keep as near to facts as your tongue can come. Did Lord Stair know of the attach-

ment, the romance—I will use pretty words for ugly subjects—that existed between you and Danton in the days before you married me?"

He advances a step or two nearer, his face, his gestures, at every minute becoming more dangerous. But Leah neither blanches nor shrinks away. Leah, who for weeks past has moved, and slept, and dreamed under the cold foreshadowing of this scene, now that the scene is verily being enacted goes through her part in it with nerves of steel.

"You ask me the question curiously àpropos, Jack." Thus, soft and unmoved, comes her answer. "Before you returned home I had made up my mind to tell you all that there is to be told on this very subject. If you recollect, I wished to make confession to you once before; it was on the night when the Robartses had dined with us. I told you then that if you knew the whole truth, instead of half, as regarded the past, it might be better. I was weak enough to hope we might have made a fresh start—yes, you and I, Jack, and have grown to be more to each other than we had ever been before. And then were harsh, or I turned coward—perhaps it was only that I turned coward, and the good moment passed. Jack, just at when we were married I used to try my best, do you know I make things go smooth!"

"With tears, and silence, and moping. 'Will you do day?' 'If driving gives you pleasure, dear Jack.' 'V have a boat for the afternoon?' 'If you care about dear Jack.' I remember the cheerful kind of spirit your endeavours were made."

"Until that morning in Rome, when you read D and everything in our lives turned to bitterness. back to this to shield myself, for indeed I am afraid

now, your anger or another's. The heart within me is dead," says Leah, "and hope and fear are dead, too. Only—well, I suppose none of us sink quite so low as to wish to seem worse to others than we are. And so I would like you to believe that at first I did try to do the duty that lay before me. I would like you to believe, also, that I have never passed one day since my marriage—no, have never woke one morning, without realizing the greatness of the wrong committed in becoming your wife."

Jack stares at her blankly.

"Cut the introduction shorter," he exclaims. "I have no taste, as you know, for tall talk. You are only wasting time in words."

"And as to my conduct earlier, nothing can excuse me, I know, and yet, sometimes, when I remember how I had been brought up, and how generously you had acted about money to my father, and how near our wedding-day had come before—No, no," she interrupts herself, bitterly, "there was no excuse for me—not the shadow of one! And you are right. I am only wasting time on words. Jack, what I have got to tell you—what I ought to have told you long ago, is this. One Sunday evening, October the 15th it must have been, little Deb was sick. I had been sitting at her side all day, and papa and Naomi were away, and, without intending any evil, I walked out in the Tuileries Gardens and as far as the Champs Elysées with M. Danton. I was away out of Madame Bonchrétien's house altogether two hours——"

"Alone! You and Danton alone! Get on with the story quick," says Jack Chamberlayne hoarsely. "Let me know with as little delay as possible, the measure of your disgrace."

"Disgrace!" exclaims Leah, lifting up her face, and looking, straight and undaunted into her husband's eyes. "No; of *that* I have nothing to tell. If disgrace exists, it is in your own thoughts, not in any action of mine. I committed an imprudence, if you will—a breach, rather, of conventional decorum, in starting for that walk with M. Danton unchaperoned. But imprudence, it seems to me, belongs far oftener to virtue than to crime! Oh, I have seen the world, remember, Jack! I went to dozens of Scarborough balls and picnics in the days when I first met you. I know what the life is that we lead, all of us here in London, and I say that, at such a pass as you and I have come to, we should look at the substance of things, not their varnish. My walk with M. Danton was an imprudence, a folly, if you will. My guilt came afterwards. My disgrace was in being false to the dictates of my own heart, and what might have been an honest, life-long——"

"In marrying me, in short! Well, at least, this is a new system of morals. The lover, the Italian vagabond, with his songs and his piano-strumming, is a 'folly, an imprudence.' The unfortunate husband, for the sake of whose British gold romance must go to the wall, is 'disgrace.' I am afraid you will find that philosophy won't wear. You will not be able to impose it on the world. For the world shall know this!" cries Jack, lashing himself with every word he utters into added fury. "I did mean to have acted generously towards you, to have taken the blame of our separation upon myself, and have screened you from the result of your own falsehood! But I will do the thing that is *right*. Though every finger in London point at me, I'll hide nothing. The world shall know what sort of woman I married and separated from in the hour when I discovered the truth!"

"You need take no trouble on that score." Unflinchingly Leah speaks, though she gauges the nature of her peril well; reads aright the pent-up fury that trembles in every muscle of Jack Chamberlayne's frame. "Lord Stair, I am sure, will need no coadjutor in publishing the details of our unhappiness."

"You—you mean——"

"That Lord Stair met me on the Sunday evening I spoke of, and recognised me. For a long while," she goes on, with a kind of desperate calmness, "I was uncertain about this, and was coward enough to tremble at the mere possibility of such a man as Lord Stair turning traitor. That was when he was my friend. We understand each other now. To-night has made Lord Stair my deadliest enemy for ever, and my secret, such as it is, belongs to him—oh, and my good name with it, if it pleases you to say so! And I care nothing. Men are cruel, this world is cruel. I want only to die. My confession to you is made. Deal with me now and hereafter as you choose."

There is silence for some few seconds when Leah has ceased speaking; the last ominous silence that comes before the outburst of a storm.

"And you think all that tirade will move me," thunders Jack Chamberlayne at last. "As if I did not know *who* put the lesson into your lips, just as he first put infidelity to me into your heart! But I will be even with the scoundrel yet. For reasons of your own, you have quarrelled with our friend, Lord Stair, to-day, you tell me. Well, and for reasons of my own, I will quarrel with our other friend, M. Danton, to-morrow. What is his address here in London?"

"M. Danton's address?—ah, for mercy's sake, don't look at

me like that. I never heard his address. I know no more than I have told you. Most likely I shall never see or hear of M. Danton after to-night. I——”

“Will you give me his address this instant, or will you not?”

“I never heard it. I believe Lord Stair mentioned that M. Danton was out-surgeon at one of the hospitals——”

“His address, I say, unless you want to die as you have lived, a falsehood on your tongue! Oh, there is no escape, Mrs. Chamberlayne,” for she had made an instinctive movement towards the door. “You shall not leave this room, you shall not stir a yard, until——until——”

But the sentence remains for ever unfinished. As he advances towards her, a hand cruelly uplifted, the wild light of frenzy on his face, Jack Chamberlayne stops, reels heavily for support against the wall. A moment later, and he has sunk—a dark stream issuing from his suddenly-silenced lips—into Leah’s out-stretched arms.



CHAPTER XXXVIII

POOR HUMAN NATURE.

“AND in another three months he would have inherited.”

So says the sympathetic world, when intelligence gets noised abroad of how spendthrift, worthless Jack Chamberlayne lies sick unto death. In another three months the hundred thousand pounds might have become the lovely Mrs. Chamberlayne’s portion. (Not that she is lovely, either; no regularity of profile, a mere fashion of the moment!) Now, as matters actually stand,

who are the legal heirs ? A Mr. and Mrs. Robarts, who live in Bayswater. An exceedingly pretty little woman ; sea-green Mrs. Hetty, for the first time in her life, dubbed with brevet-rank of beauty ! And Mr. Robarts ? Oh, a rising barrister of undoubted talent. Somewhat taciturn, like all your really clever fellows, but a young man certain to make his mark on his age. Let us hasten to leave our cards to offer our best condolences to Mr. and Mrs. Robarts.

“ In another three months he would have inherited.” It is the first miserable reflection of Colonel Pascal when he gets the telegraphic news of his son-in-law’s seizure. It is the first thought of Bell Baltimore, compelled to forfeit a river picnic for the afternoon, and uncertain, even in her latitudinarian world, whether it will be altogether decent to go out any more during the remainder of the season. And Lord Stair, brought to a sudden stop in his projects of enmity or of friendship ! Is *his* first impulse one of remorse—pity ? Lord Stair’s first impulse is to act. Presuming on his position as the friend of the house, Lord Stair takes care that the ablest physicians in London shall stand beside Jack’s pillow, superintends personally the laying down of bark before the hotel, delivers bulletins to inquirers ; acquitting himself of these duties with a quiet promptness, a mingled delicacy, and tact beyond praise, and at the end of forty-eight hours has his reward. While better men by hundreds of thousands have been wishing this world good-bye, spendthrift, worthless Jack Chamberlayne has lived—with enormous care and quiet, say the physicians, may, under Providence, yet rally.

Hetty Robarts receives these tidings from Lord Stair’s lips at the door of the hotel, and with such mingled feelings as they are calculated to inspire, drives back, the blinds of “our

brougham" decently lowered, to Bayswater. Under Providence, the Jewish wife, raised from no one knows what fifth-rate position, may inherit the hundred thousand pounds, and the little army in perambulators be beggars.

"And Mrs. Chamberlayne's devotion to her husband is something beautiful!" Thus says Hetty, with genuine tears in her eyes, to Mr. Robarts. "Lord Stair declares it to be so! Not for a single instant does she leave the sick-room. No hand but hers must give your cousin his medicine or his drink. I desire to detract from no one's virtues, Charles, particularly in a case where there are so very few to spare. But I do wish, from the bottom of my heart, that I could believe the motives of Leah Chamberlayne to be disinterested. It would do me good to think that it was your poor dear cousin, and not the hundred thousand pounds, over which she trembles."

"The result will be about the same, whatever the motives," says Mr. Robarts, dryly. "As to the hundred thousand pounds, let Jack once attain his majority, and I would put the wife's prospect of inheriting pretty much in the same balance with my own or Mrs. Baltimore's. Of the three, I am not sure but that Mrs. Baltimore's would be the better chance."

But in this Mr. Robarts, lawyer though he be, is mistaken. As Jack slowly turns his face again towards life, is allowed to write a shaky sentence on a slate, or whisper for half a minute at a time in his wife's ear, as inch by inch the poor fellow gradually wears round, so far, at least, as to be pronounced out of immediate danger, the first approach to a wish that he expresses is—that Bell Baltimore be kept away from him! Once, when he lay in the land of shadows, too weak to rebel, Bell, by bold strategy, did effect an entrance into the sick-room, her trained silks rustling against chairs and tables, her face orna-

mented with a becoming tinge of rouge and sympathy, a bouquet of powerfully-smelling hot-house flowers in her hand, "for the dear invalid."

That visit was her first and last.

"Throw the flowers through the window, and forbid the woman the door." Such were the dear invalid's orders, issued, despite his feeble condition, with unmistakable will and animus. He will not see Bell Baltimore, shudders at the name of Lord Stair, declares himself *grateful*, a sarcastic smile flickering across his thin face, for Hetty's unremitting inquiries, but begs that for the future she will save herself the trouble of her daily drive to Piccadilly. If any important change come for the worst, let Mrs. Robarts be assured that a messenger shall be despatched to Bayswater without delay!

All he wants, and has, is his wife. As faithfully as though ignoble suspicion had never arisen, or cruel words divided them, Leah watched Jack Chamberlayne during those first awful hours when the physicians, even, scarce knew which breath might prove his last. As tenderly as though they were bride and bridegroom in the first flush of their married love, she tends him during the slow and lagging days of his comparative convalescence. And her touch, her voice, the very sense of her presence, are as medicine to him. Heaven, sparing to her in some moral gifts, has undoubtedly bestowed upon Leah that most excellent thing in woman, a genius for nursing. Her dress does not rustle, her step does not sound; she divines the patient's wants by instinct, she ministers to them with hands of down. And then, just as in the old days of Deb's headaches, Leah never wearies, or never lets the sick eyes that watch her so jealously discern her weariness.

"You have cheated Hetty Robarts beautifully, my dear,"

Jack remarks to her one afternoon. In the silent monotony of the sick-chamber, days have drifted on into weeks. An August sun is blazing on the deserted pavements of Piccadilly. "But for you I must assuredly have been physicked out of this world. Three doctors at once! Easy to fathom my lord's motives when he sent all those gadflies buzzing round me! Well, you will have your recompense, Leah, in your own heart and otherwise. Only let me hold on till my birthday, and you shall see the splendid provision I mean to make for you——"

"Forgive me everything that is past, Jack," she answers, bending over him. "Forgive me all the pain I have caused you since our marriage, and I ask for no other reward. It grieves me to hear you speak of money still."

Her voice falters; a tear, genuine as ever woman shed, falls on the wasted hand she lifts between her own. But the invalid looks at her sharply. With the return of comparative strength, Jack Chamberlayne has become Jack Chamberlayne again. When he was confined to his bed, dependent on Leah almost for the breath he drew, he thought of *her*, her patience, and her sweetness, only. As soon as he could be moved to his sofa could walk, leaning on her arm, about the room, look through his window at the moving world without, he began to remember; and to remember for poor Jack, is—to suspect.

"You are a good girl, Leah. Not one wife in a town would nurse a fellow as you have nursed me, and I am sure you mean what you say—for the moment. But you are young, you see—not twenty-one yet. Why, you will have your whole life before you after I am done for and put to rest. And a hundred thousand pounds is a good big sum. It is nonsense to talk of the subject of money grieving; it must be talked, and must be thought about."

goes on presently, "we have cheated Hetty Robarts, at all events! When I lay so ill, Leah—lay, not able to move or speak—it used to choke me every time I heard them whisper her name. 'Mrs. Robarts's kindest inquiries.' 'Is there no way in which Mrs. Robarts can be of service?' And now we have disappointed her. As I mean to disappoint all other mercenary designers—you hear me, you understand my meaning clearly—if I only get along as far as October."

He continues in the same mood throughout the day; for ever harping on his expected money, and on those he will disinherit and enrich, if he have but strength enough to tide over the weeks that yet divide him from his twenty-fifth birthday. Towards evening a fresh idea seems to take possession of his mind. Dr. Wentworth is doing nothing for him! (Until now, Jack's confidence in his physician has been unbounded; sooner than risk change of treatment, he has insisted upon remaining in town throughout the burning summer heats). Cod-liver oil, phosphites, malt: as if there were no newer medicines than these! But your London specialists are all the same—never will make a step out of the beaten path of routine. Now if he could only get the opinion of an honest general practitioner; of—of a man like Danton, say? This, with a searching glance at his wife's face. There was some kind of unpleasantness between them, no doubt, in days gone by. There may have been injustice, even, for which Jack, as far as in him lies, is ready to make amends. A poor broken-down sinner like himself ought not to cherish rancour against any one. But as to Danton's abilities—"If any fellow in Europe can pull me round," says Jack, "make me hang out another six weeks—'tis only five weeks and three days to my birthday—it is he! Why, his old

friendship for you, my love, if nothing else, must give him a special interest in my case."

Leah is resting for awhile beside an open window, breathing such freshened evening air as Piccadilly in August affords, and with a reflected sunset glow lighting up the pallor of her tired face. Not a change of expression can Jack detect there, at the abrupt mention of Danton's name. She hears him patiently out; then rises, and comes over to his side, ready to execute whatever orders, reasonable or unreasonable, he may see fit to issue.

"If you are dissatisfied with Dr. Wentworth, Jack, you do well, certainly, to have another opinion. For myself——"

"You do not think that Danton would have insight—special insight—into my case, beyond all other doctors? Well, I do; and what is more, I mean to call him in without an hour's delay. You will oblige me with some writing materials."

He covers three sides of a sheet of paper with his weak, scrawling handwriting, folds his note, puts it into an envelope, which he directs. "The fact is, I have been wishing to see Danton for some days past," he explains, leaning back, wan and exhausted after even this small bit of work. "And as I had reason to know, my dear, that you were unacquainted with his address, I commissioned Wentworth to find it out for me. Now, the question is, will Danton come or not?"

"I should say—not!" remarks Leah, the blood for the first time rising to her cheek. "M. Danton's path and ours lie apart, Jack. He has his own work, his own ideas of duty——"

"And those very ideas will bring him to Piccadilly," interrupts Jack, with cynical emphasis. "Danton has a good heart. You yourself have told me so. He will never reject the proffered olive-branch from a wretch in my condition."

And the assertion comes true, like many another cynically uttered prediction. Towards the sorrows of a life of fashion and pleasure, the repentance, capricious or sincere, of a tired votary of the world—towards these, as Leah has proved, Danton is pitiless. He *has* too good a heart to disobey the summons of poor, dying Jack Chamberlayne. The note is sent off at once by special messenger. Shortly after noon, on the following day, a card bearing the name of Eugene Danton is brought up by one of the servants of the hotel, and placed in Leah's hands. "The visitor inquired for Mr., not Mrs. Chamberlayne; and as Mr. Chamberlayne does not receive——"

"Admit the gentleman directly," cries Jack, rising feebly from his sofa. "What the —— do you mean by keeping my medical attendants waiting? You will remain with us, of course, my love," he goes on, addressing his wife, as the servant leaves the room; for Leah has started up nervously, is turning in the direction of her own apartment. "Surely it will give you pleasure to witness the reconciliation of friends?"

"I will wait, if you desire it," is Leah's answer. "Only . . . as the visit is professional, I thought——"

"The visit is a vast deal more than professional," says Jack. "I consult M. Danton, not as a mere physician, but a friend, a counsellor deeply interested in the settlement of my worldly concerns. . . . Ah, here he is!" With an effort he advances a faltering step or two as Danton is ushered in. "Monsieur Danton, this is really good of you. Mrs. Chamberlayne was a little doubtful how you would receive my note; but I am glad to see you appreciated *its spirit*. You find me frightfully pulled down, Monsieur, a mere wreck of what I was, and I was never a Hercules! Well, well—much has happened since I saw you last in Paris—much has happened!"

Jack extends a clammy, trembling hand to Danton, then sinks down again upon his couch, motioning to the other to take a place beside him. "Mrs. Chamberlayne, my love, you have not bidden M. Danton welcome," he remarks to Leah, who until now has stood aloof, a cold spectator of the meeting. "Mrs. Chamberlayne has been my devoted nurse ever since my first seizure, Danton. You must not think her pale cheeks arise from bodily illness. Nothing but devotion to her duties, I assure you, has lessened Mrs. Chamberlayne's bloom."

Bloom! Leah's one characteristic beauty—the complexion, with its delicate snows, its evanescent tinges of vermeil, too bright for health—is gone for ever. Her skin has become sickly—livid as the petals of a flower shut away from air and sun. The faint, bluish tinge, which to a practised eye reveals so much, is round her lips. A change, subtler than time or illness could effect, has stolen all the youthful roundness of her features. In a second, Danton's memory carries him back to the night when he first saw Jack Chamberlayne and his betrothed threading the mazes of that ghastly Dance of Death at Madame Bonchrétien's. The lover rouged and travestied, his haggard cheeks flaming under their mask of paint, his eyes glassy and solemn. The bride, resting on the arm of Lord Stair, breathless after her waltz, and with the foreshadowing of what he who runs may now see accomplished upon her face. With cruel accuracy has his diagnosis of that night been verified; overtrue were his fears for the physical outlook of the fated lovers—Colonel Pascal's April daisies—who were to be bone of one bone, flesh of one flesh, bound together, for happiness or for misery, like living nerves in the same body, till death them should part. Yes, nature and destiny have proved honest. The wear and tear of fast London life, the sleepless

nights and hard-worked days of a career of folly, have done their office but too surely !

"All I complain of is—that you did not sooner bid me come." Seriously Danton says this, and kindly : his voice, to Leah's heart, seems speaking from the other side of the grave. "In Wentworth's hands you need no further professional advice, but as a friend, Mr. Chamberlayne, you should have thought earlier of sending for me."

He addresses the husband ; but in spite of himself, Danton's glances seek the wife's face ; the white face, beautiful in its wreck of beauty, that once was to have been his world.

Jack's jealous eyes watch him searchingly.

"Yes, to be sure, as a friend ; that is precisely what I have been saying to Mrs. Chamberlayne ; you would advise me as a friend, feel a real human interest in helping to keep my life together a few weeks more, at all events. You know how much depends upon my lasting till October, Danton ? The possession of a hundred thousand pounds (minus these West End Shylock's loans at sixty per cent.), or my leaving my poor wife there without a shilling !"

"October ! You must not talk about October," returns Danton, cheerfully. "We must send you to Mentone or Madeira for next winter, and——"

"If my father had been a wise man it would have been all over before now," interrupts Jack, shortly. "If I had been allowed to come of age, like other fellows, at twenty-one, the money would have been spent long ago, and *all the complications* of this last year would have been avoided. You understand ?"

Danton bows gravely.

"But Mr. John Chamberlayne, senior, a well-meaning man,

and sensible, as long as he kept to trade details, thought that by making the ridiculous will he did, holding me in leading-strings till I was twenty-five, he would save me, the hundred thousand pounds rather, from the hands of the tribes. You see with what result. Now, Danton, in cases like mine, the less beating about the bush that goes on the better. You have your stethoscope with you? Then let us hear how much lungs *you* say I have left, without delay. Leah, my love, you will have the kindness to leave M. Danton and myself for a few minutes alone."

He is in as hopeless a state as a man can be to live at all; no stethoscope is wanted to tell Danton that. Will the parched lips continue to breathe, the weak heart to pulsate over another six weeks, or be at rest to-night? Not all the science in Europe could answer that question with certainty.

"Don't have any qualms about telling me the truth, Danton." Physician and patient are alone together now; the examination is finished. "My birthday is on October the second, and this is the third week in August. Have I a chance of inheriting, or have I not?"

After a minute's hesitation: "My poor friend," replies Danton, gently, but with firmness, "the people of my country have this proverb, 'Our last robe is made without pockets.' *L'ultimo vestito ce lo fanno senza tasche.* When a man finds himself . . . in that narrow path that we must all alike tread, questions of money should vex him no longer. Worry yourself less about your hundred thousand pounds, and your chances of life will be greater."

A dark look comes over Jack Chamberlayne's sunken face.

"Easy for you to be so philosophical. Easy for you with

half a century of strength and health before you, to make light of money ! But for me, not five-and twenty years old, to be cut off like this,—see the inheritance that should have been mine pass to others, before my very eyes. Can you do nothing for me ? Is there no hope ? no medicine that will give me strength for five short weeks ?—I ask no more. At least, you won't refuse to come and see me to the last ? You will try your utmost for me ?”

And with those miserable blue eyes fixed on him in their wistful intensity, how can Danton refuse ? His time is over-filled already, he urges, his hospital duties are onerous, he is not in general practice, lives far away from Piccadilly ; but all his objections are unavailing. Doctor Wentworth is going with his family to the seaside for several weeks, and Jack declares that he will see no other physician in his absence. Unless Danton consent to attend him—oh, unprofessionally, of course unprofessionally !—he will be left to die like a dog. As to making it worth his while——

“ We need not talk about that,” says Jack, looking with sharp meaning at Danton's face. “ You are not the kind of fellow, I know, to care for fees. Pull me through till October the second, and your conscience will square off all accounts. Have the people in your country no proverb to tell how a good man's conscience is his own exceeding great reward ?”

“ And now I feel easier in my mind as regards my worldly affairs, than I have done for weeks,” he remarks to Leah, when they are once more alone. “ Danton has got a brain in his head, knows his trade well, and means to do his best by me. If any man in London can prolong my life, he will. You see I possess an acuter knowledge of human nature than you gave me

credit for, Leah. M. Danton has too good a heart to forsake an old friend in extremis! With his science and your nursing, my love, I may yet live long enough to do the thing that is right."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE LAST IRONY OF FATE.

THE world has left London long ago, saving of course one unimportant section, the couple of million working men and women who never leave it. Yet it happens that none of the persons intimately concerned in the last scene of Jack Chamberlayne's life have put a very long distance between themselves and Piccadilly. Lord Stair procures his daily food on board a friend's yacht at Cowes. Bell Baltimore, more bored by Autumn than by Spring, by nature than by art, flies restlessly from watering-place to watering-place. Hetty Robarts, with her attendant perambulators, babies, nursemaids, and husband, has not the heart, "in our poor young relative's deplorable state," for anything livelier than Herne Bay.

It comes, therefore, to pass, that all events transpiring in Jack Chamberlayne's dying chamber—for alas! not the most euphemistic of court doctors could now call that chamber by any other name—are as well known among inquiring and interested friends, as though the season were still at its prime. And more than one warning does Jack receive, anonymous and otherwise, as to his temerity in choosing so unorthodox a physician as M. Danton for his attendant. Anonymous is not a word one cares to have to write; but a faithful chronicler must

set down facts, without extenuation. And I fear, with a hundred thousand pounds at stake, many honourably-minded people would hold an anonymous letter justifiable, if it could protect the last moments of a suffering and intestate fellow-creature from the mercenary designs—of others!

Jack communicates each fresh note of warning as he gets it to his wife, laughing in his own wisdom at his advisers, and the object of their suspicions alike. Fools who would pretend to understand his business better than himself! As if he could not, unhelped, discover whys and wherefores in plenty for M. Danton's brotherly kindness! As if anonymous letters were needed to show that so much patience, strength, gentleness, must have their centre and their source in self! Ah, one may be thought incapable for five-and-twenty years, yet prove keen-witted in the end—keen-witted enough to outreach the knaves who have traded on one's folly, and still act righteously and to the approval of conscience in all things.

As time wears on, the weeks, at last, lessening to days that stand between him and his inheritance, Jack seems to long with a kind of morbid anxiety for his unorthodox physician's presence. It chances, just at this season of the year, that Danton is entitled to brief leave of absence from the hospital to which he belongs. He spends his hardly-earned holiday by remaining in town, and becoming not only Jack Chamberlayne's doctor, but his nurse. The invalid, capricious, it may be, through extremity of weakness, cares less for his wife's ministrations than formerly. It is Danton now, who must give him his medicine, help him from his bed to his couch, read to him, as you would to a child, a few simple lines at a time—cheer him! Leah, to whose tired heart the situation appears the last supreme irony of fate, looking on, passive.

What can be the true mainspring of Danton's conduct? In the sultry Autumn hours, during the long thought-searching watches of the night, impossible that this question should not force itself upon her mind. As regards Jack's opinions, sincere even in their cynicism, there is no room for doubt. The look, the tone, with which he alludes to Danton in her presence, "A wide-awake fellow that—the one doctor in Europe sufficiently interested, *personally*, in my case, to pull me through," speak to her with sufficient clearness. But Danton, himself? Every human being must act from principle of some kind, from motives, good or bad. What past remembrance, what latent hope, can attract Eugene Danton to the dying pillow of a man he has so little cause to love or to respect as Jack Chamberlayne? The answer comes to her in its unvarnished truth from Danton's own lips.

The weeks, as I said, have diminished to days, the days have become hours that stand between Jack and his legal coming of age, and he, the heir, is fast sinking! Death, all that can with certainty be called his own—Death, and the train of squandered yesterdays that lie behind! Mr. and Mrs. Robarts are back at Bayswater, in eager hourly expectation of what their destiny may send them. Bell Baltimore has returned to town, and calls often, but is not admitted, at the hotel in Piccadilly. (In half-joking, half-serious mood, I should explain, Jack was often wont to speak to Bell of the legacy he meant to leave her if ever he became master of his money.) Post after post arrive delicate notes of sympathetic condolence from Lord Stair. Colonel Pascal's telegrams are really pathetic in their frequency and eagerness.

"Crows about the dying eagle," remarks Jack, with bitter pleasantry. "They might have the good sense to wait another

twenty-four hours, be sure at least whether they are paying attention to a pauper or a millionaire!"

It is the evening of October the first, and Danton, as usual, is in close attendance beside the sick man's couch. Lawyers and lawyers' clerks have been with him throughout the day, busily getting ready that last will and testament to which, if he but live to see to-morrow's sun, Jack's feeble hand may scrawl a valid signature. Either the excitement attendant on this business, or the effects of some new medicine which Danton during the last few hours has been giving him, have brought a tinge of colour to the poor lad's wasted face; something like, yet awfully unlike, the brightness of health is in his blue eyes.

"Yes, they might have the decency to wait a little longer, show somewhat less impatience for their spoil. However, I bear no ill-will," gasping piteously for breath as he speaks. "I have forgotten none of my friends, as time will show, you, least of all, Danton. I——" he lowers his voice, and signs to the other to approach his ear. "With the assistance of the lawyers, I have done you the best turn to-day, sincerely, and on my soul I believe it, that any man *could* do to another."

"Do me the good turn of not remembering me in this matter at all, my friend," is Danton's quick reply. They are alone together, but the door of the adjoining room, into which Leah has withdrawn, stands open. "Money, every supposed advantage connected with money, is outside my life, and has been so always."

Jack Chamberlayne looks at him like one perplexed.

"The first night we ever met, at Madame's, there, in Paris, I took a fancy to you," he remarks, in an altered voice. "Among all the people who were present, Colonel Pascal, my Lord Stair, and the rest, I said to myself, 'there's the one honest man out

of the lot.' And I begin to think I was right. As to things that have happened since—well, the past is over and done with, and you have been a right-down good fellow to me in my need, and as to motives . . . hang it all, if one comes to look too closely into *them*——”

He breaks off fretfully, turning his face away on his pillow; and for the first time Danton begins to suspect the jealousy which, even in death, gnaws at Jack's heart.

“No use guessing at motives,” he repeats, kindly. “Do you know, my poor friend, that that is a hard thing for you to say. What motive but one could have prompted me to help you in your trouble?”

Jack mutters an inaudible word or two between his teeth, a dark flush rises to his worn cheek and temple; and Danton, after a few moments' painful silence, goes on.

“Most men have a special aptitude for some one employment under the sun, or, if not an aptitude, a liking. Mine is for being with sick people. It is my work and my pleasure. What I have done for you I would have done for any other suffering man in London, if I had had time.”

“You have *made* time for me,” says Jack, with emphasis. “You have given up exercise, air, your holiday, even, to come to my bedside. Well, and I am grateful, Danton, and to the best of my power I have done you an excellent good turn to-day, although, just at first, perhaps, you may not think so. Lord, Lord,” he continues, with a hollow laugh, “to think how disinterested we all are, when it comes to the point, about money! Now I asked my wife a question this morning—in the presence of the lawyers you know, everything in due legal form—I asked Mrs. Chamberlayne a question . . . of importance, I can assure you, Monsieur, to more persons than herself. Her answer was

a noble one. Under certain remote contingencies—lawyers' details, not worth entering upon—it is Mrs. Chamberlayne's wish that my money shall be divided among the different hospitals for sick children in London. I wonder what the Pascal family will say to that! And now, you—you, Danton, would like your name omitted from my will altogether."

Danton listens with patience to the end of this long tirade. Then he rests his hand upon one of the thin hot hands whose fingers are twitching so nervously at the coverlid of the bed.

"Jack, my poor fellow," he remarks, for the first and last time calling Jack Chamberlayne by his Christian name, "when a man has to bear such bodily pain as yours, 'tis hard that his mind should be worried by troubles that do not exist. You have got hold of a wrong suspicion about me—nay, never speak, I know it, and I mean to set that suspicion at rest. You ask what has been my motive in giving up exercise, rest, my holiday, even, for your sake?"

The door between the sick-room and the adjacent one is open, a shrinking figure stands within it. With senses feverishly sharpened, Leah can catch every accent as it falls from Danton's lips.

"I answered you just now, because nursing was to my taste, the one occupation for which I have an aptitude. I will go further. I have done my utmost to keep up your strength——"

"To lengthen out my tag-end of life! Call things by their right names."

"Because I know of what vital importance your coming of age must be to Mrs. Chamberlayne."

"Of course you have!" cries Jack, in his energy almost lifting himself upon his pillow. "Humbug for you and me to pretend not to understand each other! For the sake of your

old *friendship* for the wife, you have been a faithful physician to the husband, eh?"

The expression of the pinched, hectic face jars on Danton horribly—the face that should be lying still and peaceful, life and its little hour of passions and conflicts, so nearly over!

"Yes," he answers, with slow, deliberate meaning, "for Mrs. Chamberlayne's sake, as much as for your own, I have done all that in me lay, to be of help to you. But it is neither of Mrs. Chamberlayne nor of you that I have to speak now. I want you to know the truth about myself. This great god Money, my friend, in whose service men and women sacrifice themselves so readily, is to me abhorrent. I look upon a fortune like the one you hope to inherit as the blood-money of human souls. If you were to leave me the whole, or one shilling, of your hundred thousand pounds I would equally refuse the bequest. If, at any future time, through any circumstance, or combination of circumstances, your money could become mine, or in any remotest way benefit me, I would starve sooner than soil my hands by touching it. Do you believe me?"

Jack stares at him in a sort of stupor.

"I believe you, and I have been a fool," he whispers faintly. "All my life has been a mistake . . . I can see it now. Danton, you will bear no malice towards the poor dying wretch you have befriended? I . . . have been a fool."

So their interview comes to an end. Whatever Jack Chamberlayne's five-and-twenty years of existence may have proved him, these words, the last that Danton hears him speak, are the words of wisdom.

CHAPTER XL.

"OH, THAT 'TWERE POSSIBLE!"

THE cord is loosed, the bowl broken at the fountain. Spendthrift, worthless Jack Chamberlayne has passed away, not altogether unmanfully. His executors have given orders for his tombstone; the money-lenders have put in their claims against his estate. His acquaintance, the season of the year being stagnant, are making conversation out of his will; his tradesmen regret him. So much for Jack Chamberlayne. And the hundred thousand pounds—what of them?

Jack lived until the evening of his twenty-fifth birthday, retaining his faculties clear to the last, and affording ample time to the lawyers for the completion of their work. Not even Hetty, disconsolate Hetty, can raise a doubt as to the validity of his will! And he kept every one of his connections in remembrance, as he promised to do. Colonel Pascal, "my worthy father-in law," receives as his legacy his own I. O. U.s, amounting, it may be said, to a packet of very respectable thickness. Bell Baltimore gets a portrait of Jack himself, that "my dear cousin was often good enough to admire," set in brilliants. Hetty Robarts has five hundred pounds, wherewith to buy mourning. Even to Lord Stair, a mere casual acquaintance, is bequeathed a memento, a ring twisted in the shape of a serpent, with fiery ruby eyes, selected out of the scanty stock of Jack's personal jewelry.

To Leah goes his entire fortune, minus the West End Shylocks' charges—a hundred thousand pounds, as rigidly, righteously

tied up in trust as English law and English lawyers can tie them. If she marry again, the usual legal defences are made against the second husband, as against a certain robber and possible bankrupt, with settlements cumbersome and many, in respect of generations yet unborn—provided always the second husband be a British subject. If she marry an alien, she is to forfeit every shilling by the act. (Did not Jack, with his last breath, hint of this good turn to Danton?) And, "in accordance with my dear wife's expressed wishes," the money shall be divided amongst the different hospitals for sick children in the Metropolis.

An unjust will, a mad will, an exceedingly fair and equitable will, and a great deal more than the Pascal family had any right to expect. So run the varying opinions of rumour, during the fleeting space of time in which Jack Chamberlayne and his money are spoken of at all. The next question is—how are the provisions of the will to be carried out?

Will Mrs. Chamberlayne marry Lord Stair, or not?

Joining one scrap of truth—or falsehood—together, after its manner of mosaic-work, rumour would say, Not!

Through the agency of Mrs. Baltimore—(surely you must know her by sight? Faded blonde who drove a pair of hack roan ponies last season—kind of person you meet at public balls, and at Court. Have heard, but don't believe that there is a husband somewhere)—Through the agency of Bell Baltimore it transpires that Mrs. Chamberlayne resolutely refused to hold communication with Lord Stair from the hour in which she became a widow. His Lordship, it is known, has gone to Malta for bronchitis. *Would* a man like that have bronchitis and go to Malta, unless he believed his suit to be hopeless? For once in his life, Lord Stair's game has been not only a losing but a

ridiculous one; and admirable resignation do his best friends display under his defeat.

Will Mrs. Chamberlayne marry the mysterious "alien" pointed at by her husband's will, and whom it takes no very great amount of intelligence to connect with the Italian doctor who attended Jack Chamberlayne in his last sickness?

Marry for love, and let the hundred thousand pounds be divided among the hospitals of the Metropolis? Yes, a woman with Jewish blood in her veins, a woman who, for money, could bring herself to accept Jack Chamberlayne, would be so likely to commit the crime of a romance, incur the brand of poverty afterwards!

What *will* Mrs. Chamberlayne do? She is scarcely twenty-one years old; presumably has another half-century of life before her, with wealth unlimited, and (barring one unimportant restriction) liberty to love and marry where she will. A well-gilt perspective, surely, for any one, for Leah most of all; Leah, who a short twelvemonth ago deliberately sold herself for this price, who was reared from her cradle to consider money as the sum of human ambition, a position, luxury, ease, the only things under the light of God's sun worth possessing!

Colonel Pascal walking about Paris in his sables—almost as deep as he wore when cruel fate first made him a widower—Colonel Pascal, with handsome Naomi on his arm, can scarce command a decently solemn face as he speaks of the affliction that has befallen his beloved elder daughter.

"Mrs. Chamberlayne is so young, so mere a girl, that we may hope much from time, but poor Chamberlayne's death has been a terrible blow to her, as to us all. Not strong? Oh, you are

entirely misinformed." The Prince Charming actually writhes at those two words, yet has to hear them often. *Not strong!* His Leah not strong—with a dowry of a hundred thousand pounds! The very suggestion sounds to him like impiety. "Mrs. Chamberlayne's health is perfect, I thank you. There is some talk of spending the winter in Italy with my youngest little girl, but more for the child's sake than her own. Mrs. Chamberlayne's affection for her sisters has always been something charming—charming!"

. . . And Leah, herself? Reader, do you know what it is to exist, crushed beneath the weight of a granted prayer, and with no prospect but death of having the awful burthen, the answer to your own desire, lifted from you? Just at first, little as the world may think it, she grieved honestly for Jack; remembering only his better qualities, his early love for her, the tardily awakened repentance of his last hours of life. But this grief, of its nature, is evanescent. A human being who has not filled the heart, living, can scarcely be expected to fill the memory, dead. Then there comes upon her a craving for movement, a restless longing to get away from London, England—from everything connected with the hopes and the despair of the last six months. Deb might be strengthened by spending a winter in Italy: let Italy be her destination! Her physician tells her, looking grave as his fingers touch the fluttering pulse, that she is herself out of health and needs change. Nothing, of course, to be seriously alarmed about, says the suave professional optimist, still, these lowered conditions of the system may not unwisely be regarded as the border-land between security and alarm. "The spirits must positively be raised, my dear Mrs. Chamberlayne! Let the mind once recover its tone through the cheerful influence of tra-

velling, and the body will need no further medicine, depend upon it."

But travelling, with every added means of enjoyment that wealth can yield, does but minister, Leah discovers, to the fever that consumes her. The strong hours master her in the south as in the north! Alas, when one has grown weary of the sun, what matters it whether he shine upon Italian olive-groves or English elms? With her powers of happiness at their vividest, Leah's was not a temperament to derive much solace from external interests: the earth must ever turn on its axis with supreme and immediate reference to herself! Naples and Rome in the winter, the Bagni de Lucca in summer; picture galleries, smiling landscape—what healing is there in it all for her, Leah Chamberlayne? What comfort can her empty heart reap from this moving panorama of mountain, sea, and city, from the highest that man's hand has accomplished in art, the fairest that God's hand has lavished on nature!

Were not the experiment of one more London season worth trying? So, after a year and a-half of wandering, she begins to ask herself. Come—one is not dead at twenty-two! It may be that among familiar faces, familiar scenes, this lethargy will pass with an effort. Return to the great mart where all things (or so nearly all) are to be bought and sold! Hire a house, possess carriages, liveries, friends! Resolve to *live* by dint of will, by mere mechanical daily habit; and, taking example from the all-forgetting world around, trust to time for one's cure!

And the London house is hired; liveries, carriages, and friends are possessed, and Leah is not cured. Passionate disappointment, selfish or the reverse, unfits us, fatally, for the littleness of artificial life. How, after learning the taste of

that divinest anguish, shall a human soul sink to the talk, the interests of a Bell Baltimore? How return to the fopperies of upholsterers and dressmakers, to an existence of fashion? Leah came back from Italy in a chronic state of life-weariness, inert, passive under each day's weight as it fell upon her. Before long, her disease takes a new and active form. She begins to look upon gold as upon a living personal enemy, to discern the raw material of every past ill through its glitter. Her idol has become her destroyer;—standing, in hateful successful rivalry, between her heart and the one remote chance earth might yet hold for her of happiness. The fine London house, with its velvet-piled carpets and obsequious servants, the noiselessly hung carriages, the delicate meats, the wines, the friends . . . oh, *how* she loathes them all!

Her greatest pleasure, it would be juster to say her only one, is an occasional day spent at the seaside cottage, where Deb, under Aunt Hepzibah's homely rule, wears cotton frocks and builds oyster-shell palaces once more. Here, at least, are neither flunkies nor friends, delicate meats nor velvet-piled carpets; and here Leah may bring her faltering lips to speak of Danton.

She has never seen him, never heard from him since that day when he stood beside Jack's dying couch nearly two years ago. But Deb, in her own fashion, keeps up a correspondence with her friend.

"M. Danton saved me from starvation in Paris," says Deb, in the old prime-sautier style. "He made Madame give me mutton chops. He rescued me from papa's economy and the blackbeetles in the downstairs cupboard, and I shall love him and write to him always. A million thousand pounds should not come between me and my dear M. Danton."

So it happens, through Deb's small agency, that a great result is brought to pass.

One day in June—the roses are smelling fresh around Aunt Hepzibah's windows, the sea and sky are blue—Deb, with an air of mystery, puts a letter into her sister's hands. "A letter from a very old friend, Leah, and one who is more anxious about you and me, perhaps, than we think for. Do you recognise the handwriting?"

"I believe I have seen it on one occasion in my life," Leah answers, with a trembling smile.

And then she turns away from the window, turns to the roses, and the sea, and sky, and reads.

"You have not written to me for a great many weeks, little Deb. Have you lost my address, or what? Write to me at once, child, and tell me some news about your sister, Leah—if you can, find out if she would care to receive a visit from me. I have seen Mrs. Chamberlayne once or twice of late, without her seeing me, and I want to have a talk to her about her health.

"Your affectionate friend,

"EUGENE DANTON."

A flush, lovelier than her forfeited bloom of youth and health, stains Leah's down-bent face as she reads. Danton loves her still. And at the thought it seems as though all the long separation, all the mocking weight of wealth were suddenly lightened. Love? No; one will not speak of *that*. It is possible that she may win his forgiveness, at least, before she die.

CHAPTER XLI.

"AFTER LONG GRIEF AND PAIN."

A FOUR o'clock sun shines on the motley crowd in Park and Row ; on Bell Baltimore as she drives her hack roan ponies, as heretofore, but wearing a somewhat thicker cloud of pearl powder, a somewhat thicker veil than when we saw her last ; on Hetty Robarts in her modest brougham ; on *Tatters* in hers. The kaleidoscope of fashion presenting much the same brilliancy as it did two years ago, although with some trifling changes of pattern, some readjustment of its bits of paste and tinsel. So runs the prosperous, pain-ignoring world without, now let us glance within.

Within, before a looking-glass in her dressing-room, stands Leah, something as she stood on that October night in Paris, with Deb once more enacting the part of critic. A costly dressing-room this—throwing into shade the meagre apartment on Madame Bonchrétien's third étage—with mirrors from ceiling to floor, with soft lights, sparingly admitted, with hangings, artistically draped. The full time of Mrs. Chamberlayne's widowhood is over ; past the stage of lavenders and greys through which youthful widows lapse tenderly back into conquest and colour. Milliner's work of every hue and texture is strewn around.

"The blue is a perfect dress, *as a dress*, Deb, but I have not quite the complexion for blue, now. Draw up the blind, my dear ; one wants daylight, not rose-colour, for rehearsal. And this eau-de-nil ! Fancy my tallow-candle cheeks set off by

eau-de-nil! I believe, after all, I shall do wisely to return to sober black."

"But M. Danton likes to see people in pale colours. I have heard him say so, often. And you know, Leah, it is such bad luck to put on black for a wedding or anything."

"A wedding—you little wisehead!" cries Leah. "And pray who is going to one? What connection is there between a wedding and——"

"——And M. Danton coming, by his own request, to see you, after all this long time that you have not been friends? Well, I don't know that there is any connection, just at present, Leah. Still, the moment I received his letter I felt——"

"——Deb, child, if you knew the truth, you would not chatter so lightly. M. Danton and I are going to meet and shake hands once more across a grave. Remember that, little Deb, across a grave! If I do not wear black, I must, at least, choose something better suited to the occasion than any of these furbelowed absurdities that Morgan and the milliners between them have been pleased to prepare for me."

She crosses over as she speaks to a bureau, unlocks a drawer, and after a second or two of hesitation, takes forth a brown silk dress, faded of hue, unfashionable of make; the dress in which she first saw Danton, and which her own hands packed away amidst her trousseau fineries on the night before her marriage.

"*That?*" exclaims Deb, with unconcealed disappointment. "You mean to wear a faded, shabby dress of a hundred years ago, just on the day I want you to look your very best?"

"I believe I shall look my 'very best' in this," says Leah, with a blush, conscious as a girl's. "I looked hideous enough.

in all conscience, in the brilliant blues and green. But, Debbie, mind you are to give an honest opinion. Think—not of the number of yards in the skirt, or the want of style in the sleeves, as Morgan would—but of the general effect upon my complexion.”

She assumes an air of gaiety, but her hands tremble as she fastens the buttons of the dress, the colour comes and goes upon her face.

“Leah . . . oh, Leah, how awfully thin you have grown !” cries Deb, the tears rushing to her eyes. “Why, did that brown silk ever *fit* you ?”

And the child presses nearer—a cold dread for the first time entering her heart—to Leah’s side.

“Well, I am a little bit thinner, am I not, Deb ? I have lost my *ong-bong-pong*, as Mrs. Wynch used to say. But I am getting old, you must remember—almost three-and-twenty ! One cannot keep one’s youthful roundness for ever.”

Leah has wasted to a shadow of her former self. The artifices of the milliners, laces and puffs and frillings, have concealed the fact with tolerable success hitherto. The old brown silk betrays the secret with such startling clearness as even to shock herself.

“And papa and Naomi have never had a day’s illness since they were born,” says Deb, her small face white and scared. “And you—oh, it’s no use your putting me off any more, Leah, you *don’t* grow stronger.”

“There may be better things in life than growing stronger,” answers Leah. “As to losing flesh—it is no sign of health, Debbie, one way or the other. And M. Danton is a doctor, you know. He will judge of me as I am, not as I seem.”

“But you will not wear that dress ?” the child persists,

"promise me you will not. It makes you look a skeleton."

"The colour suits me, my dear; I told you so, long ago in Paris, and as to these few loose folds—well, we will have the blinds drawn down, so that M. Danton shall not scan defects too narrowly. And you know I mean to receive him in my little morning-room where Morgan takes care that everything shall be rose-coloured."

"And will you wear no ornaments, Leah?"

"Yes, I will wear some flowers—bring the cup of violets from the mantelshelf, and select the freshest for me you can find—and this knot of yellow ribbon in my hair." Taking one as she speaks from her dressing-table drawer. "And now, Deborah, the last finishing-touches given, can you have the assurance to tell me that I am not a pretty woman still?"

"If only—I did not remember you as you used to be," answers Deb. "But perhaps M. Danton may forget——"

"——Ah, let us hope so!" interrupts Leah, with sudden harshness of tone; "I know too well what you mean, child. Let us hope that M. Danton will have had the kindness to forget!"

And she rests her hand upon the table, and looks curiously at her own image in the glass—something as the women of Verona may have looked at the faded face of him of old, who had 'seen Hell' and lived.

"I believe there is about enough resemblance left to recall the Leah Pascal of three years ago," she remarks at length, "no more. Poor little Deb—never cry over the loss of a pair of pink-and-white cheeks, child! They were not worth a tear. It is not for the sake of my beauty that M. Danton has volunteered to come and see me to-day."

But a sigh, that is well-nigh a sob, escapes Leah's breast as she turns with weary disgust from the glass. To forfeit wealth, position, friends, all the prizes of accident that have fallen into her hands, were nothing to her, over the departure of health she has not wasted a regret. To realize the loss of beauty, the beauty for which Danton first loved her—this is the bitterness of death.

"I hear a knock at the front door," says Deb, presently, and the child takes one of Leah's hands and holds it wistfully between her own. "It is Danton's knock, Leah. I should know it among a hundred. My dear, would it give you courage for me to come down with you at first—just to take the edge off the meeting, you know?"

Deb's lips quiver, her eyes fairly brim over with tears at last. But Leah has recovered all her self-possession. "It is better for me to receive M. Danton alone, Deb. You shall come in by-and-by, when I ring for you. Courage! Is it such a very hard thing, do you think, to face reconciliation with a friend one likes?"

"Your hands are cold, so cold," says poor Debbie. "And a minute or two ago they burned like fire."

"The weather, Deb, nothing else. In spite of Doctor Wentworth, I maintain that there is a touch of east wind in the air, still, and the east wind always fevers me. Kiss me, child—so. Now tell me once more how I look?" And with this she takes a sad parting glance at her mirror. "Why, Deb, I have actually got a colour. In spite of all you say, I maintain that I may pass for a pretty woman still—if only M. Danton will have the kindness to forget!"

CHAPTER XLII.

"TO FEEL THE ARMS OF MY TRUE LOVE."

READER, for one moment after they come face to face he thinks her unchanged—poor heart, could she know it!—with such transitory brightness does the joy of meeting invest her. Then there returns before his vision a girl in the blossom of youth, dressed like this, a knot of yellow ribbon in her hair, some violets at her breast. He sees the fair white arms, the rounded throat, the cheeks—and knows that he is looking upon a shadow. "About enough resemblance left to recall the Leah Pascal of three years ago, no more."

Dead silent, Danton stands; vainly struggling against the truth that is forced upon him, unable to trust his voice lest it betray him. Leah is the first to speak.

"It was so very good of you to offer to come, M. Danton. But, indeed, I cannot think why you should not have visited me sooner. Two years seems such a big slice gone out of one's life, and life is so short—and—and Debbie will be here directly. How much stronger Deb has grown, has she not?"

Danton takes both her little thin cold hands, and grasps them tightly in his.

"And you?" he asks. "I want to hear everything about yourself." How well she remembers that grave tender tone! How plainly she sees the chestnuts in the Champs Elysées, and the stars shining through their branches! "Are you strong, Mrs. Chamberlayne? Do you suffer?"

"Look at me," is Leah's answer, raising her face to his; "read the answer for yourself. Deb was telling me, not five

minutes ago, that I have grown an ugly old woman—at three-and-twenty! What do you say?"

"I say that you look ill, and that you are prettier than ever," is Danton's prompt reply. "Don't you remember we made a compact to speak the truth to each other always? I hold to my word still, you see."

And loosing her hands, he stands back a step, and looks at her—as a man can never look, save at the woman he loves!

The rose-coloured blinds, after all, have not been lowered, the room is flooded with honest, fault-exposing sunlight, yet Leah shrinks not from its contact. Before the expression of Danton's face vanity dies; self, and self's humiliation, are forgotten in her exceeding great pity for *him*!

"I have had a kind of fever about me for some time past, M. Danton; that is what has pulled me down a little, as you see. It is nothing very serious. My attacks, when they come, are sharp, but soon over. Don't let our meeting be turned into a professional visit, please," and she smiles. "I get quite enough of them, I can assure you, from Doctor Wentworth."

"I have come expressly to know how you are, to think, to speak of nothing but you!" cries Danton, with passion in his voice. "What subject but your health would you have me talk about? Wentworth visits you often, you tell me. And your attacks, when they come on, are sharp. What are your other symptoms? Do you cough?"

"Not a bit," says Leah, gaily, but without raising her eyes to his. "And I eat well, and sleep as much as life in London will ever let me. There is nothing really the matter with me, M. Danton, but a little nervousness—the complaint of so many foolish, indolent victims of civilization. If I had had, ages ago, to gain my living by potato weeding, I should have been cured!"

"And you have had no other opinion, sought no higher skill than Wentworth's?"

For a short space Leah hesitates; then, "As you insist upon putting me formally on my trial," she replies, "I suppose it will save time if I answer categorically. Only you must never speak of all this before Deb! To poor Debbie we call my malady neuralgia. I had another opinion, some months ago. At Doctor Wentworth's request, I called in K——, soon after we came back from Italy. You have heard of him?"

"Yes . . . I have heard of him," answers Danton, his colour changing at this abrupt verification of his darkest fears.

"They say he is the best man in London for anything to do with the heart, and I am afraid there is no disguising that I suffer from something of that kind."

"And he has ordered you?"

"Rest, freedom from excitement, an untroubled conscience, early hours. Very much the same list of impossibilities that were ordered for me, nearly three years ago, by Doctor Danton in Paris."

"What seemed impossibilities then may be easy of attainment now," says Danton, possessing himself once more of her hand. "You are mistress of your own actions, Mrs. Chamberlayne. You have everything that money——"

Leah starts away, as though the word had stung her. "Money!" she exclaims with bitterness. "Oh, that I should hear its name from you. Money is my curse, my enemy! It is *that* which has destroyed me. I feel its weight when I wake in the morning, it pursues me through the day, lies down beside me at night. But for money I should not be the miserable wretch I am. But for money——"

"—Leah, but for money, you would be mine?" And as he

speaks Danton's arms are round her, hold her close. "Let me hear you say so. After the months—the years of weary waiting, let me have a moment's hope at last!"

• • • • •

"One thing is certain, M. Danton. You cannot be in full possession of your senses to-day. However, I will give you another chance of escape. In marrying me, understand that you will be marrying a beggar, sir—a literal beggar, without one shilling in the world."

"Happily I shall be able to earn shillings enough for us both, Mrs. Chamberlayne. I told you so once before, if you remember, long ago, and you would not believe me."

But Leah believes him now—too late!

CHAPTER XLIII.

"ROUND ME ONCE AGAIN!"

Too late, computing by hours. And yet it seems to me human joys should be measured by their intensity, rather than by the exact portion of artificially divided time that they may happen to endure. Between the afternoon of their reconciliation, and the day on which Leah becomes Danton's wife, just eleven days elapse; during eleven long June days this feverish, changeful, hardly-satisfied nature tastes perfect happiness. Of how many contented, humdrum, long-lived people out of ten thousand could as much be said?

"My story, if any one should take the trouble to write it, has—that first essential for popularity—a happy ending," she remarks to Danton, once. "It has been pretty tragic, hitherto,

in spite of some few interludes of outside gilt and varnish. But now—"

"—Now it comes to the sombre grey conclusion of a love-match," he interrupts her, hastily. "We shall have to live upon, my Leah, nearly as much as you have found insufficient, hitherto, for milliners and the glove-shops."

"To live upon!" And one of the wistful smiles that make his heart cold, crosses Leah's face. "Ah, I dare say if it came to adding up butchers' and bakers' bills you would regret your bargain, M. Danton." She can never be brought to call him by his Christian name. It was as M. Danton that she first knew him in the Rue Castiglione. She is well content that he should be M. Danton to the last. "Happily, we need not think of butchers and bakers now. The only immediate expense to which I shall be forced to put you is my wedding-dress."

And that same afternoon, when his hospital duty is done, she makes Danton go with her to choose it. A quaker-like grey dress it is, bought "for economy," at an East End linendraper's. Morgan, the maid, I am sure, would disdain to be married in the like. But Leah feels better pleased with her purchase than she ever felt over a work of art from Worth or Roger—in her pleasure, can scarce refrain from letting the shop-people divine the occasion on which the dress is to be worn. For it is paid for out of Danton's pocket! The burthen of her own wealth seems already lessened at the thought.

And she snatches at every possible foretaste of her coming freedom; delights in playing at poverty, just as when she and Naomi were children they used to delight in playing at riches. Leah would not be Leah unless she over-acted her part a little, were it at the last page of her history. Make use of her

brougham? No; she has taken a distaste for broughams. The noiseless hearse-like movement, the want of air makes her ill. For freedom, independence, comfort, what private carriage in London can compare with a hansom? And trained skirts are incompatible with hansom cabs; the old brown silk (not bought out of Jack Chamberlayne's money) suits them better. And stalls and boxes are a mistake. When you go to the theatre, how charming to be able to wear a bonnet and sit in a place where you can enjoy the acting and the music, unnoticed!

Danton, who estimates too well the nature of her strength, would fain have her husband it more jealously. But Leah insists upon spending every evening that he can spare abroad, and always in the same Bohemian fashion; she is in a state bordering on exaltation; vitality—such feverish vitality as is left her—supporting the brain, at the expense of all other interests; and is insensible to bodily fatigue. Once they go to the opera—aloft among the gods, you may be sure, “as befits our means,” an expression for ever on Leah's lips now—and far beneath, in one of the boxes on the grand tier, she sees Lord Stair. Milor's portmanteaus have left the Rue Castiglione for good; Milor has paid Bonchrétien to the last sou of her bills. Not a tradesman in London but would be proud to obey his lordship's orders, or honour his noble signature to a note of hand. For Lord Stair is about to be married. He has been into the city's depths, he has found his Miss Molasses, the harsh-featured, not over-youthful lady by whose side he sits—the future Viscountess Stair.

Coming home that night—the weather is warm, the sky star-illuminated, and the lovers walk some little portion of their road—Leah, for the first time since her engagement, makes mention

of Lord Stair's name, and of the past. But Danton stops her lips. In putting money aside she has broken, he tells her, with every person and thing that once belonged to money. Lord Stair has no more existence for him, Eugene Danton, than if he inhabited a different planet. All that concerns him is her love. The love, he adds, with quick emotion, that, God willing, is to be the crown and blessing of his whole future life.

The swift-winged hours pass by. Ere Leah can realize to herself that she is happy—*Leah Chamberlayne happy!*—will come the day that they have fixed upon for their marriage. And still no presage of evil, no cloud big as a man's hand, has risen above their horizon. They are always together now, and alone. Leah is jealous even of Deb, and has sent the child back to her home with Aunt Hepzibah. She is jealous of every hour that divides her from Danton, of the air he breathes, of the sun that shines upon him in her absence. So certainly does,

"Ruined love when it is built anew,
Grow fairer than at first, more strong, far greater."

Danton has obtained a month's holiday from work, and (the Prince Charming being happily absent in Brussels) Leah has planned that they shall spend their honeymoon in Paris. The whirl and restlessness of a great city are precisely the influences she should fly from, Danton urges. The seaside—Switzerland—any choice were a wiser one than Paris. Leah shows her old fine superiority to reason. It was in Paris that she and Danton first met; and as to health—what watering-place in Europe can vie, as far as shade goes, with the Tuileries gardens or the Elysées? The scene of their starlit walk, of her life's poor

hour of poetry : Elysian fields, to which she can now look back with conscience almost unweighted by remorse !

The preparations for the wedding are made ; the special license is ready, the bride's quaker dress completed. In another two days—to-morrow—the hospitals for sick children throughout London will be enriched. Then Leah falls ill. Doctor Wentworth, hastily called in, declares the presence of another physician necessary, and with the two men of science Danton confers, and learns—no, there was nothing for him to learn, he gains but the official label of a Latin name for his despair ! Leah's unstable hold on life may be loosed at any moment, in any sudden excitement, any sharp paroxysm of pain ; may be prolonged—such rare cases stand on record—for years.

"Tell me word for word what they say." This is her first request to him, when the physicians, grave of face, fee in hand, have rolled away in their broughams. "Don't forget our old compact, now when I need truth so desperately. I am no coward. I wish to be told my exact chances of life and death."

Danton tells her, not in cold language that black and white can reproduce, but lovingly, tenderly—so tenderly as almost to make the death-warrant sound sweet.

"For there is the possibility, the forlorn outside hope of our spending years together, yet," she says, looking at his white face with yearning eyes. "And the cleverest doctors are wrong sometimes. Why should these two be infallible ? Oh, how I want to live ! I am so young—the world is so good. Surely the desire of life, in itself, should give me strength ?"

It gives enormous strength, of a transitory, fatally consuming kind. The preparations for their wedding, as I have said, are

completed, even to such business details as letters for Colonel Pascal and the lawyers. Only twenty-four hours more, and they will be man and wife. Twenty-four hours more! Leah *forces* herself with a last supreme effort, into rallying, comes down to the drawing-room, talks cheerfully over the details of their coming journey, makes Danton sing for her—the Serenade of Schubert, and "Si tu savais," just to bring back "that hapless day on which his reason began to play him traitor."

. . . As the afternoon wears on, a great change comes over her. She, herself, pronounces it a change for the better, and Danton, against his judgment, is carried away by the false light in her eyes, the false strength that lends volume to her pulse and voice.

"Let my chains be loosed," so after a while she whispers to him. "Let me once feel myself at liberty, and I shall be content. To die, still in bondage, would be a double death. We know so little of what is to come. How can we tell . . . you and I . . . that the awful weight might not be on me through eternity?"

And she cannot free herself from the thought. If she were to die with the load of the hundred thousand pounds, the blood-money of her own soul still upon her!

"You may be released from it at any moment that you choose," says Danton, taking her fevered hand in his. "We have no friends to bid to our marriage, my Leah, no wedding feast to set forth. In two hours from this time the burthen of your wealth can be put away from you for ever if you will?"

And Leah does will it. Coquettish coyness, engaging feminine irresolution—ah, these are things that belong to the living: she has done with them.

When Danton has quitted the house, to make what arrange-

ments are needful for their marriage, she goes up to her room and dresses herself in the quaker dress and bonnet that are to be her bridal attire. Then she puts together the few little trinkets that belonged to her as a girl; trinkets that were her mother's mostly; divides, seals them up and writes "Naomi" and "Deb" on either packet. These she carries with her, and one solitary ornament out of her well-plenished jewel-boxes—a cheap mosaic locket, such as the common people wear in Rome, containing only a few torn violet petals and a date, graven inside the case.

The house is quiet, she passes down the staircase unnoticed by any of the servants, and opens the front door where Danton already awaits her. Then she finds herself driving to another quarter of the town; by-and-by, like one taking part in a dream, knows that she stands before the altar-rails of a dimly-lighted church, a sleepy-eyed clergyman, white-surplised, with open book confronting her, and Danton at her side.

"Wilt thou have this man to be thy wedded husband?"

For the second time she hears that question, for the second time takes those solemnest oaths that human speech can register, but with what a difference! How have her surroundings altered since the evening in the Marbœuf Chapel, when she knelt in Brussels and orange-blossoms, and—with special correspondents, and titled groomsmen, and a gracefully agitated father looking on—forswore herself.

The ceremony is short, exceedingly: something it may be, upon the bride's face, warning the sleepy-eyed clergyman that 'tis wise to proceed with haste. In less than half an hour, all is over, the fees are paid, the names signed: and then Danton takes his wife to her new home, the bachelor lodging in an un-

fashionable East End street, for which her pride of wealth and luxury has been exchanged.

"And this is home, this is where we are to live," Leah falters, clinging heavily to her husband's arm as he leads her up the staircase. "Oh, M. Danton, I am better already. The weight has passed from me. This house seems fairer to me than any Italian palace that Deb and I saw during our travels, for I am free!"

Danton's sitting-room is on the first floor, and in spite of its British chairs and tables, possesses something of the same artistic atmosphere that once belonged to "the Count Danton's suite," in the Rue Castiglione. Fresh flower-scents greet the bride as she enters, a piano stands open; the engravings she remembers are on the walls; the pipes of all nations, the faded satin slipper used for a tobacco-pouch, are above the mantel-piece.

"Things would have been ordered differently had I thought that I was to bring my wife home to-day," says Danton throwing his arms around her. "But my poor love is fated to taste the full flavour of poverty from the beginning."

"I taste a sweeter flavour than I have ever known before!" is Leah's answer. "This is the coming home that pleases me. When you remember me now . . . I mean, if at any future time we are separated, it will be as forming part of your common life—the life I should have shared of——"

She turns from his side, and with a failing step moves round the room, looking, one by one, over his books and pictures, her face held away from him. Ere starting on some long and unknown journey you might imagine a traveller thus taking into his memory every little familiar détail of the home he loves, and shall see no more. Then she comes back—very shadowy.

very spent-looking she has become during the last two or three minutes—and steals a pale hand round his neck.

“If I might rest now, M. Danton? This has been a tiring day . . . I should feel quite strong after a little rest.”

He wheels round a low chair for her to the window, then kneels beside her, so that she may lean her head upon his breast. Evening is closing in fast, such sky as can be seen across the opposite roofs is opal, the hush that even London knows at the decline of a summer day seems to brood above the city. A smile, lovely in its expression of absolute peace, flickers round Leah's lips, the lips whose girlish beauty cruel time has had no power to spoil; a light tranquil as the yellow sunset itself, is in her eyes.

“It is so good to rest—I want perfect rest,” she murmurs, “and I know when I wake I shall be better. M. Danton, you will be friend always to little Deb, you will talk to the child of me? Never let my name be put away . . . between you and Deb . . . because I am gone . . . And think of me with forgiveness! I sinned against you and against my own soul . . . but I have suffered—suffered . . .”

And then comes silence.

In the arms of her true love, riches and their burthen lifted from her, Leah's spirit has fallen asleep—to know no earthly waking.

The “last words of the romance” are spoken.

THE END.

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